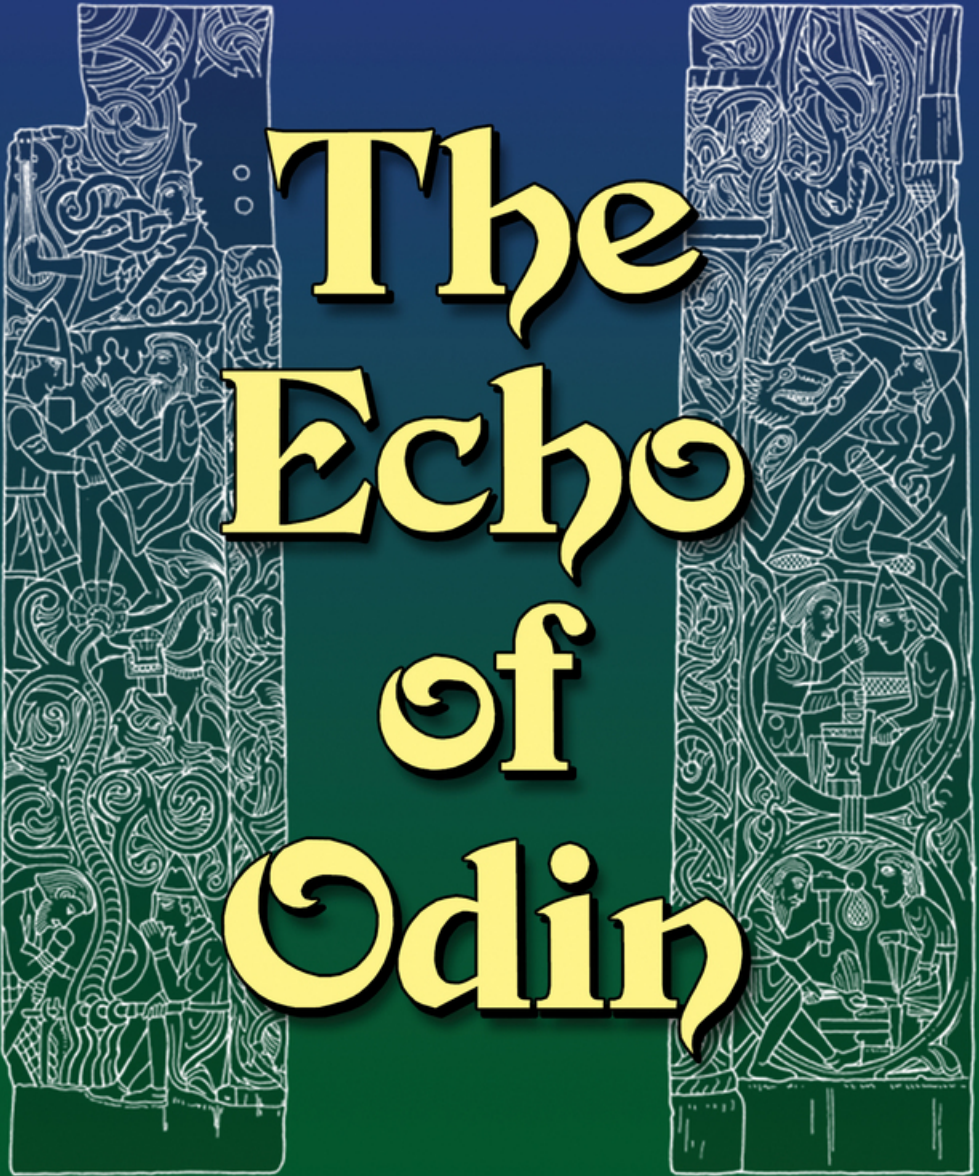


Norse Mythology and  
Human Consciousness



# The Echo of Odin

Edward W. L. Smith

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ALSO BY EDWARD W.L. SMITH  
AND FROM MCFARLAND

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*The Psychology of Artists and the Arts* (2012)

*The Person of the Therapist* (2003)

*The Body in Psychotherapy* (1985; softcover 2000)


# The Echo of Odin

*Norse Mythology  
and Human Consciousness*

EDWARD W.L. SMITH



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To a man who hearkens  
to the echo of Odin,  
Edward Shannon “Eddie” Smith

Direct your eye right inward, and you'll find  
A thousand regions in your mind  
Yet undiscovered. Travel them, and be  
Expert in home-cosmography.

—Henry David Thoreau  
[*Walden*, Conclusion]

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# Preface

Soon after its publication in 1981, I discovered Charles Hampton-Turner's *Maps of the Mind*. Studied, then set to rest on my bookshelves save for an occasional consultation, I re-read it a few months ago. The re-reading of this encyclopedic work rekindled my interest in theories and philosophy of mind, and left *my* mind afire. The purview of this tome extends far beyond the psychological theories of mind that were included in my graduate studies, such as those of Freud, Jung, Adler, Henry Murray, Kurt Lewin, Gordon Allport, Kurt Goldstein, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and others. Rather, its scope reaches out to the theories and philosophy of mind of figures such as Kierkegaard and Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre and R.D. Laing, Max Weber and Claude Levi-Strauss, Alfred Korzbski and Noam Chomsky, William Blake and Saint Augustine, Hegel and Marx, and to Zen and catastrophe theory. *Maps of the Mind* is remarkable not only for its scholarship and its breadth, but for the fact that it was written in such an accessible style. It renders complex theory and rarified philosophy into tasty and digestible portions.

Another work I found both interesting and valuable as I continued my pursuit of theories and philosophy of mind was *Metaphors of Consciousness*, edited by Ronald S. Valle and Rolf von Eckartsberg (1989). Also rich in content, it is a more challenging work to master than that of Hampton-Turner, many chapters exceeding the boundaries of usual academic erudition and entering the realm of the recondite.

While reference to classical (Greco-Roman) philosophy and mythology is included in *Metaphors of Consciousness* as well as in *Maps of the Mind*, Norse mythology is not considered in either of these books. It is this notable omission that I hope to compensate for in the present work. Perhaps, then, Norse mythology will take the place that it deserves among the multifarious maps of the mind.

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# Introduction

Norse mythology is both rich and complex. It is far more than a source of children's adventure stories of gods and giants, elves and fantastic monsters. This mythology evolved from an ancient Germanic oral tradition and was recorded in written texts by multiple and now often unknown authors over a period of several centuries. These written texts offer moral direction, practical advice concerning social conduct, and a detailed *cosmology* or theory of the universe. This cosmology includes a theory of the origin of the universe or *cosmogogenesis*, known also as *cosmogony*, and a description of its physical arrangement or *cosmography*. This cosmography, we are told, is populated by sentient beings that are peculiar to each identified realm: gods, goddesses, dark elves, light elves, giants, and humans, as well as a not inconsiderable number of monsters. They are brought to life through stories that are at once both entertaining and richly endowed with metaphor. That is to say, *these beings and the interactions that reveal their natures can be looked upon as symbolic expressions of particular types of human consciousness*. Additionally, I suggest that *each realm of this cosmography, itself, represents a particular level of human consciousness*.

In considering Norse mythology, one is well-advised to expect neither consistency of details from story to story, nor the invocation of Aristotelian logic and rationality. As Bruno Bettelheim (1989) stated, "soon events occur which show that normal logic and causation are suspended" (p. 62). Although he was writing about fairy tales, as we will soon see the fairy tale is a sibling of the myth.

The skalds or poets who told and later wrote these myths were not careful or logical system builders, for their idiom was one of poesy, not of science. The meaning of the myths was of greater concern to the skalds than was their structure. That is to say, essence trumped form. As Sheldon

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B. Kopp (1971) explained, “Paracelsus wrote that a guru should not tell ‘the naked truth. He should use images, allegories, figures, wonderous (*sic*) speech, or other hidden roundabout ways” (p. 19). Paracelsus as well as Kopp would surely agree to our including the skald in this tradition. And what Kopp is identifying here is the use of a particular *epistemology* or way of knowing, that is, metaphorically. As he instructs, there are three basic ways of knowing. One is rationally or based on logic; if something is logically consistent, then it is taken as true. A second way of knowing is empirically, known through the senses. Truth, therein, is based on perceiving correctly. Science, of course, relies most heavily on this way of knowing. Sensory data, sometimes gathered with the help of technical instruments, are the basis of knowing. Knowing metaphorically means depending on “an intuitive grasp of situations, in which we are open to the symbolic dimensions of experience, open to the multiple meanings that may all coexist, giving extra shades of meaning to each other” (p. 17). The reader familiar with the writing of Carl Jung (1964) will no doubt recognize these three types of epistemology as corresponding to the functions of thought, sensation, and intuition, respectively.

Furthermore, as already indicated, the myths were told and retold, then written by multiple authors over a period of centuries. Each skald, no doubt, gave his performance or his text a personal inflection that was influenced both by selective memory and personal style. Not to mention that a skald probably took care not to tell or write a myth in a manner that would be offensive to a chieftain or a king for whom it was performed or set down. Cases in point are the works of Snorri Sturluson (also spelled Snorre Sturlason), the *Prose Edda* which he completed about 1220 CE and the *Heimskringla* which he most likely wrote ten or fifteen years later, well after his home country of Iceland had adopted Christianity as its official religion. During this time, the Christian King of Norway, King Hákon the Old, watched the affairs of the Icelanders quite closely. Scholars have pointed to passages in Snorri’s work where there is strong suggestions of Christian influence. “We see in these texts signs of the thirteenth-century Christian outlook in which and through which they were written” (DuBois, 1999, p. 5).

A greater appreciation of Norse mythology as religion has undoubtedly been damaged by a number of circumstances. For one, early Christian missionaries demonized the Norse pantheon. The “people of the book,” that is, Christians, Jews, and Muslims, follow a path of exclusivity (Camp-

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bell, 1990). Their belief is in one true god, and he proclaims that he is a jealous god. God orders in the first commandment of the Decalogue that there is to be no other god before him. Furthermore, in the second commandment he forbids the making of graven images.

Norse pagan belief may have been, on the other hand, more inclusive if not syncretistic (allowing of amalgamation of religions). They recognized parallels between their local gods and those they were exposed to through their travels or the arrival of merchants and Christian missionaries to their homeland. There was “a tradition of comparison, in which the Christian Lord appears at first as just one more deity of the sky” (DuBois, 1999, p. 61). Thus, they even allowed a foreign deity to be brought into their pantheon.

As concrete evidence, perhaps suggesting at least a syncretistic tendency on the part of the Norse, there is a soapstone mold in the National Museum of Denmark for casting both the Christian cross and *Mjöllnir*, Thor’s hammer (Lindow, 2001, p. 28). Further tangible evidence is provided by an amulet that was found in southern Iceland that seems to be a combination of a cross and a Thor’s hammer; one end of it bears the head of a monster, presumably a heathen symbol (Davidson, 1996, p. 67). Interestingly, “the Cross as talisman and motif becomes prominent in Nordic art, graves, and hoards well before the full embrace of Christianity” (DuBois, 1999, p. 152). Such inclusive predisposition is clearly illustrated, and with a touch of humor, in a story told of *Helgi the Lean* who worshipped both Jesus and Thor, depending on whether he was on land or at sea. “On migrating to Iceland from Ireland, Helgi is said to have called upon [Thor] to guide his landing and advise him in selecting a place to settle. Once settled, however, he names his district Kristnes (Christ’s Headland)” (DuBois, 1999, p. 60). By the thirteenth century, “some of the traditions or devotions formerly associated with pagan deities became reattached to ‘legendary saints,’ sometimes with little alteration” (p. 63). To reiterate, this attitude of syncretism was not, however, shared by the Christian missionaries. At the same time, Thomas A. DuBois (1999) offers a cautionary note, writing that “it is possible to imagine the pagan religions of the Nordic region as somehow inherently more pluralistic and respectful of neighboring faiths than was Christianity. Such a view involves privileging certain pieces of evidence over others” (pp. 40–41). There is ample evidence, he points out, of competition for followers between local pagan sects as well as between Christianity and Norse paganism.

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Unfortunately, there seems to be compelling evidence of the use, or more accurately, the misuse of Norse mythological themes by Hitler and other high officials within the Third Reich. Certain aspects of Norse mythology, including some of the runic characters used both for magical purposes and for writing, were taken over by the Nazis in the shaping of their Fascist ideology and the staging of their public rallies.

The swastika itself belongs to this group of symbols. Guido von List had already identified the 18th rune, GIBOR, as a “concealed swastika” long before it was adopted, at the suggestion of Adolf Hitler himself, as the official insignia of the NSDAP in 1920... The SIG-rune was the rune of victory ... the TYR-rune was the rune of the struggle, ... the OTHIL-rune was the symbol of “blood and soil,” and the HAGAL-rune was that of salvation (or racial purity) [Thorsson, 1989, pp. 25–26].

*Nota bene:* The runes are ancient mystical symbols, born of the holy signs conceived by Bronze Age priests, and possibly even earlier magicians. These modern meanings which were placed on these runes by the Nazis were for the nonce, meanings which suited their political ends. The insignia of the SS, for instance, was fashioned from the *sol* rune which symbolizes the sun with its heat and light, and for the purpose of writing has the phonetic value “s.” This guilt by association of Nazism and Norse mythology, tenuous though it was, tainted the study of the latter for many scholars and has lasted to some degree even to the present time.

Finally, full appreciation of any mythology is dampened if one is unable or unwilling to adopt what Ernst Cassirer identified as the “metaphorical attitude” (Laffal, 1965). Otherwise stated, one must appreciate both the figurative and extended quality of a myth in order to understand its full message. The myth is not literally true, and its meaning goes beyond the denotative meaning of its words. It is symbolic, and if judged by a criterion of concrete reality its full value is missed.

Recognizing the above impediments to its greater appreciation should not lead one to overlook the near ubiquity of cultural works that have been derived from Norse mythology. Certainly, the 1876 *Ring Cycle* of Richard Wagner—*The Ring of the Nibelung* (“The Rhinegold,” “The Valkyrie,” “Seigfried,” and “Twilight of the Gods”)—stands out. These operas have been performed thousands of times thereby exposing generations to aspects of Norse mythology. (For better or for worse, however, these operas may have perpetuated the historically inaccurate image of the Viking in a helmet bedecked with bovine horns or wings.)

Both important and pervasive, too, are the works of J.R.R. Tolkien—

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*The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, books that subsequently inspired several hugely successful films. Much of their imagery and some of the proper names Tolkien used come directly from Norse mythology. As stated by J.R.R. Tolkien's son Christopher, "he derived the names of the dwarves in *The Hobbit* from the first of the poems in the Edda, the *Völuspá*, 'the Prophecy of the Sibl'" (Tolkien, 2009, p. 3). We find in this eddic source a host of dwarf names, among them *Motsognir* (mightiest ruler of the dwarfs), *Durin* (next mightiest), *Nyi*, *Nithi*, *Northri*, *Suthri*, *Austri*, *Vestri*, *Althjof*, *Dvalin*, *Nar*, *Nain*, *Veig*, and *Gandalf*, to name but a few of the more than sixty in those works (Hollander, 1962, pp. 322–323).

Other books with this influence, too, have sold well and have found their way to the screen. Viking stories, then, have populated books, films, and even several recent television productions. As culturally important and as entertaining as this more recent corpus is, what may sometimes be missed is the wealth of wisdom that lies beneath the glossy Hollywood surface.

The faint and mystical voice of Norse mythology whispers to us even as we go about our busy day-to-day lives focused on practical, mundane concerns. Stopping to consider only our English language, for instance, we find that the names of the days of the week are dominated by remnants of the Norse pantheon. Setting aside Saturday and the pagan vestiges Sunday and Monday, the days dedicated to the sun and the moon, respectively, we find *Tyr*, *Odin*, *Thor*, and *Freyja*, or perhaps *Frigg*, known also as *Frija*, as the deities behind the eponyms we know as Tuesday (Tyr's day), Wednesday (*Odin's* day, or to use an earlier Germanic form, *Wotan's* day), Thursday (Thor's day), and Friday (Freyja's day or Frija's day). Similarly, we find the names for these days of the week in Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish to reflect these Norse deities directly. In German, *Freitag* (Friday) displays an obvious connection, while on a subtler note, the name for Thursday, *Donnerstag* (Thunder's day), alludes to Thor, the thunder god. Dutch, too, not surprisingly, reflects these deities in its words for Wednesday (*woensdag*), Thursday (*donderdag*), and Friday (*vrijdag*) (Zerubavel, 1985).

Some Christian holidays, too, reflect the pagan roots of the Norse or even earlier Germanic tribes. Like the scion of the horticulturist, the crucifixion-cum-resurrection of Jesus was grafted onto the pagan stock of the celebration of the spring equinox to create the hybrid known as Easter. It is about the time of the spring equinox, in the northern world,



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that hens begin to receive sufficient stimulation of their retinas from the lengthening hours of daylight that the laying of eggs commences once again. The egg, therefore, has symbolized the coming of spring or the spring equinox. Thus, Easter eggs and church services in celebration of the resurrection of Jesus share the stage in the pageantry of Easter morning. Christmas also evolved from the coming together of pagan and Christian concerns, namely the winter solstice celebration of *Jul* (Yule) and the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Jul is in celebration of the time when the long, dark hours of winter begin to shorten and light is symbolically reborn (Pennick, 1989).

In Scandinavian communities abroad, as well as in Scandinavia itself, the use of names from Norse mythology for first names as well as traditional family names is common. The list multiplies greatly when compounds using the names and the numerous alternate spellings are included. *Frodi, Gerd, Sigyn, Sigurd, Sigurth, Sigurdardottir, Solveig, Thor, Tor, Torr, Thorvald, Thorbjorn, Thorsbakken, and Thorsson*, are but of few of the cases in point.

Many further examples of such soft whispers from the gods, anagogical whispers if you will, can easily be found. It is to the exploration of such whispers from Norse mythology that much of the material in the following chapters is devoted.

By way of locating Norse mythology within a broad historical and cultural context, we can identify four great pre-Christian traditions in Western culture, the Greek, the Roman or Italic, the Celtic, and the Germanic. These are Heroic traditions, and as such, they tend to emphasize the individual as the responsible agent for his or her life. This emphasis on the individual is characterized by each person's seeking his or her own personal spiritual path. The Near Eastern cultural tradition, in contrast, emphasizes the person as a member of community. It is this latter tradition wherein the model is that of the spiritual leader who instructs others as to which path to take. Thus, we find therein the guru, the rabbi, and the priest (Campbell, 1990). Although each of these two cultural traditions espouses a largely overlapping list of virtues, an important difference in emphasis is evident. In the Near Eastern tradition, wherein great honor and power are afforded the spiritual leader, obedience is the supreme virtue. The word of the guru, the rabbi, the pope, the bishop, the priest and such figures is to be followed. Within the Heroic tradition, on the other hand, and perhaps especially so for the Norse, the supreme virtue

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is heroic courage. For this is a *sine qua non* both difficult and uncommon for the seeking of one's own and unique spiritual path.

Interestingly, Joseph Campbell (1990) suggested that the key to the importance of the legend of the Grail in Western culture is that this legend integrates the Heroic tradition of the West with the Near Eastern tradition, thus weaving together the threads of the pre-Christian and the Christian spiritual paths. In an Old French text titled *La Queste del Saint Graal* (*The Quest of the Holy Grail*) written by a Cistercian monk whose name is long forgotten, there is a revealing passage. As Campbell explained, when Sir Gawain, nephew of King Arthur, proposed the quest for the Grail, the knights agreed all would go on the quest, but "they thought it would be a disgrace to go forth in a group, so each entered the forest at a point that he, himself, had chosen, where it was darkest and there was no path" (p. 211). Here we see at once, underscored, the value of the quest for the individual way and the necessity of courage. We see, too, the weave come together as the Grail quest most Christian is conducted in the style most Heroic. The fabric which results is at once a colorful and durable one, indeed. In our times, perhaps the threads of Christianity are more easily recognized, given the explicit attention they are given. The ubiquity of Christian teachings is surely impressive. But the contribution of the Heroic threads to this warp and woof should not be ignored or denigrated, subtler and perhaps more implicit as these threads may be.

Norse mythology is firmly situated within the Germanic, Heroic tradition. As such, the Norse myths have been a vital and ubiquitous element of the cultures of Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and beyond. Those who are familiar with the cultures of these countries may well have noticed how many vestiges of Norse mythology are still extant and even celebrated. They have helped to constitute part of the context in which generations of children of the Northern world have been raised. Filtered through generations, the time-tested wisdom found in Norse mythology may well have application in contemporary times. The longevity of this body of mythology surely bespeaks its validity as a moral and philosophical guide, that is, a cynosure of sorts. Generations of Nordic people have refined the myths through their telling and later through writing them down, culling the dross, and as if in the alchemist's alembic, have retained the essence of these myths in purified-cum-rarified form. Its symbolism successfully approached, its metaphorical quality recognized, each myth offers some advice and direction for navigating the complex paths

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that all generations have had to take in life. That is to say, at their core these myths are representatives of the world's wisdom literature. To enunciate these myths is, then, to find age-old wisdom.

I do not suggest that the messages implicit in these myths necessarily originated in Norse mythology, or that they are unique to the Norse culture. Rather, I suggest that by dint of their Norse inflection these myths offer both a particular access to these messages and a particular perspective on their meaning. Furthermore, the expanded meaning offered by this inflection has held influence on Western culture for centuries. This access and this Northern European perspective are not reserved for just the people of Scandinavia, or even to the wider Germanic culture, but are available to anyone who approaches these myths with respect, curiosity, and wonder. Although the echo of Odin's voice may be soft, I hope to show that its range can be far-reaching.

## The Nature of Myth

Fundamental to the understanding of myth is the recognition of its symbolic and metaphorical nature. As Jungian analyst Jean Shinoda Bolen (1992) expressed this, “myths, with no claim to factuality, tell us the truth the way dreams do—in the language of metaphor and symbol” (p. xi). Joseph Campbell’s (1968) words lend clarification to this. “Mythology, in other words, is psychology misread as biography, history, and cosmology” (p. 256). And, he added emphatically, that “wherever the poetry of myth is interpreted as biography, history, or science, it is killed” (p. 249). Perhaps it is in response to a universal urge to make sense of one’s deeper experiences that myths are created. Mayhap it is this very penchant for making meaning of one’s existence that has led to the creation of myths throughout the entire time of human existence. As Campbell (1972) has suggested, “mythology is apparently coeval with mankind” (p. 21). In the process of myth building and giving life to myths through participation in ritual, the creation of the universe and the most significant of life’s experiences are examined. Thus, birth, death, afterlife, competition and jealousy, war and conquest, loyalty and betrayal, love and hate, and such are the grist for the mythopoetic mill. The myths which address the spiritual or transcendent origins of the universe, of humankind, or other more specific beginnings, why things are as they are, can appropriately be referred to as *etiological* tales, or to use a Gallicism, *pourquoi* tales. These tales prove elemental to mythology. Within sacred traditions, Campbell (1972) has called attention to universal themes of “Virgin Birth, of Incarnations, Deaths and Resurrections, Second Comings, Judgments” (p. 253).

The myth unfolds as an explanatory story, a story that can be embodied as it is enacted through corresponding ritual. Ritual is the myth come alive as it is ceremoniously acted out. A widely accepted definition of the term “ritual” is that of Evan Zuesse: “Those conscious and voluntary,

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repetitious and stylized, symbolic bodily actions that are centered on cosmic structures and/or sacred purposes. (Verbal behavior such as chant, song, and prayer are of course included in the category of bodily actions.)” (DuBois, 1999, p. 122). Thus, the ritual is embedded in a context of myth. One might say that the myth is the full text from which the script for the ritual is extracted. When enacted, the ritual performance requires bodily involvement, and this embodiment of the ritual makes it more personal and thereby lends additional power to the myth. That is to say, the myth gains puissance when experienced through dancing, singing, chanting, praying, or dramatic presentation. At the same time, “the tribal ceremonies of birth, initiation, marriage, burial, installation, and so forth, serve to translate the individual’s life-crises and life-deeds into classic, impersonal forms” (Campbell, 1968, p. 383).

It should be obvious from the above that I am using the word myth in a sense that is paradoxically both deep and lofty. It is deep in that it is complex and multilayered, requiring careful study if it is to be understood at all levels, including those more arcane. To appreciate how complex, and how esoteric myths may be, one need only consider how much time and effort scholars have put into the examination of such. This study has called for erudite words and concepts such as explication, expatiation, hermeneutics, and exegesis. Surely, the point is made. It is, too, a truly lofty study in that it is of high and noble meaning as contrasted with the use of the word myth simply to mean a false belief or an untrue story that is taken as true, as in “urban myth.” It is unfortunate that the word myth has come to have two such different meanings, for whenever a word has two contrasting meanings the stage is set for a comedy of errors or worse. Too often, the use of myth as meaning untrue has been carried over and tainted the word in its serious and profound meaning.

Indeed, in a very accurate sense, myth and religion are closely affined. No disrespect and no disparagement of religion is implied in this usage when the term myth is correctly understood. The political organization of religion aside, religion is constituted of etiological stories, parables for moral instruction, allegorical explanation of the meaning of existence and its various sub-topics, and rituals that are based in that sacred text, designed to empower the text through direct bodily experience. So, in the profound sense of the word myth, religions are myths. In the present context, then, Norse mythology and the Old Norse religion are one and the same. These terms are fungible, that is, they may be used interchangeably.

## 1. The Nature of Myth

Myth can be understood more fully by contrasting it with the two other forms of folk tales, the fable and the fairy tale. Bettelheim (1989), in his book *The Uses of Enchantment*, explicated the relationship of myth to these two closely related forms. Let us look first at fables. Finding that Samuel Johnson's words would serve him well, Bettelheim quoted Johnson as follows. "A fable seems to be, in its genuine state, a narrative in which beings irrational, and sometimes inanimate, are, for the purpose of moral instruction, feigned to act and speak with human interests and passions" (p. 42). Embedded in this quote, Bettelheim found the essence of the fable; the fable always explicitly states some moral truth. In addition, whether the fable is sanctimonious, which is frequently the case, or amusing, there is no hidden meaning. That is to say, it leaves nothing to the imagination.

By way of careful and detailed definition of the fable, D.L. Ashliman (2003) offered the following:

It is a short fictitious work, either in prose or in verse, frequently (but not necessarily) using animals or even inanimate objects as actors, and having the exposition of a moral principle as a primary function.

... At their best, fables are compactly composed and, like all allegories, gain extended, unwritten meaning through the use of symbols [xxiii].

With this definition in place, Ashliman underscored the importance of compact composition by stating that the first requirement of the fable is brevity.

I believe that of the more than 280 fables traditionally attributed to Aesop, even though scholars are not even certain that any one such man ever existed, the fable that is most exemplary of the above points is the well-known "The Fox and the Grapes." Having no hidden meaning, and expressing the very soul of brevity, it is an allegory of a moral principle acted out for us by a fox. In case a refresher is needed, or just for the grin of amusement that it typically evokes, it goes like this:

A hungry fox saw some fine bunches of grapes hanging from a vine that was trained along a high trellis and did his best to reach them by jumping as high as he could into the air. But it was all in vain, for they were just out of reach. So he gave up trying and walked away with an air of dignity and unconcern, remarking, "I thought those grapes were ripe, but I see now they are quite sour" [*Aesop's Fables*, 15].

Fables, Bettelheim (1989) wrote, are moralistic, and although they may be just entertaining, they often evince a demanding and threatening mien. In contrast, a myth is not a cautionary tale. Thus, the essential difference between a myth and a fable is that the moralistic core of the latter is absent

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in the former. A good example of the cautionary note sounded in many Aesopic tales is found in “The Stag and the Vine.”

A stag pursued by the huntsmen, concealed himself under cover of a thick vine. They lost track of him and passed by his hiding place without being aware that he was anywhere near. Supposing all danger to be over, he presently began to browse on the leaves of the vine. The movement drew the attention of the returning huntsmen, and one of them, supposing some animal to be hidden there, shot an arrow at a venture into the foliage. The unlucky stag was pierced in the heart, and, as he expired, he said, “I deserve my fate for my treachery in feeding upon the leaves of my protector.” Ingratitude sometimes brings its own punishment [*Aesop's Fables*, 160].

Note that “The Stag and the Vine” has a brief note of explanation tacked on the end. The collectors and editors of Aesopic fables often added such guidance in the understanding or application of the moral of the fable either before (a *promythium*) or after the tale (an *epimythium*). Such additions seem to be in the interest of trying to insure that the callow reader not miss the point.

The relationship between myth and fairy tale is a more intricate one than that between myth and fable. It is noteworthy that in most cultures, according to Bettelheim (1989), no clear distinction is drawn between myth and fairy tales. And, indeed, the two forms do have much in common. In both forms, there are exemplary characters and situations, and miraculous events take place. A naive reader might assume that the very name fairy tale reveals the *differentia specifica*. But unfortunately, the name of the latter is misleading, for as Bettelheim pointed out, most fairy tales do not have fairies in them! Over time as the stories were told and retold, some fairy tales grew out of myths while others became incorporated into the myths themselves. For instance, the *jötuns* or giants of Norse mythology, sometimes referred to as *trolls*, survived as the trolls of Norwegian fairytales such as we find in *Bukkane Bruse* (“The Three Billy Goats Gruff”).

Nevertheless, in the course of his exploration of fairy tales, Bettelheim (1989) articulated several ways in which they differ from myths. First, the events in fairy tales, no matter how improbable they may seem, are related in a rather casual manner. They are presented as things that could happen to anyone in the course of everyday activities. The problems, themselves, are ordinary ones. But in myths, there is an implication that the events could not have happened to anyone else or in any other setting. The events are truly unique. Thus, the ordinary human being of the fairy tale is replaced by the superhero in the myth. One of the ways that this differ-

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entiation of the mythic hero from the everyman of the fairy tale is conveyed is by the device of giving the mythic hero a proper name. Often even the hero's lineage is offered, including proper names, as well as other named figures. That is to say, a myth is a story about a particular hero. Thus, he or she is named *Beowulf*, *Brunhild*, *Balder*, or *Freyja*. Often in fairy tales, the protagonist is not even given a proper name. Rather, we have the "little mermaid," "the little match girl," "the cottar," or simply "the boy." What may seem like an exception, upon closer examination, is revealed to be either a general name or a descriptive name. The use of a very common name, such as John or Paul suggests a generic figure. As interesting as the descriptive names of fairy tales sometimes are, they too invoke the image of everyman or boy or everywoman or girl, if you will. Consider, for instance *Askelad*, the young lad who sat by the hearth playing in the ashes, or *Thumbelina* of not more than an inch in height. With the paucity of proper names offered the protagonists of fairy tales, it is not surprising that the supporting roles deserve only descriptive names. Thus, we find "the king," "the queen," "the younger brother," and "the older sister" and such filling out the cast of characters.

True fairy tales, stated Bettelheim (1989), always have happy endings. Not so with myths wherein the endings are most often tragic. Closely related to this difference in endings is the trend for fairy tales to be essentially optimistic in tone, whereas myths tend to be characterized by a pervasive, if subtle pessimism. How often we have heard a version of "and they lived happily ever after" at the conclusion of a fairytale. In order to see the contrast, we can turn to the myth of Baldr the Good, wise, sweet-spoken, and merciful god, son of Odin and Frigg. When Baldr had "terrible dreams that threatened his life," Frigg set out to protect him, but failed. Through a treacherous and fatal trick on the part of *Loki*, Baldr was killed and sent to *Hel* (*sic*). When another of Odin and Frigg's sons, *Hermud the Bold*, travelled to Hel to try to negotiate his return, he, too, failed. Herein is a story of a threatening dream, a goddess's failure to protect her son, treachery, and failure of a god to rectify the tragedy. Such intriguing yet tragic stories are a staple in the diet of Norse mythology.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Tolkien has also discussed the fairy tale, laying out the several facets which he saw as necessary for a good fairy tale (Bettelheim, 1989). These are four in number: fantasy; recovery; escape; and consolation. The necessity of fantasy is, of course, self-evident as it is embedded in the very definition of a fairy tale. Recovery is from



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despair, often deep and dark. Escape is from some grave danger. In commenting on Tolkien's requirement of consolation, Bettelheim wrote that "consolation requires that the right order of the world is restored; this means punishment of the evildoer, tantamount to the elimination of evil from the hero's world—and then nothing stands any longer in the way of the hero's living happily ever after" (p. 144). Here is the happy ending, something Tolkien considered as necessary for all complete fairy tales. The happy ending is the final consolation.

Although threat may seem implied in Tolkien's requirement of escape from danger, Bettelheim deemed it appropriate to add threat to Tolkien's list. "Maybe it would be appropriate to add one more element ... I believe that an element of threat is crucial to the fairy tale—a threat to the hero's physical existence or to his moral existence" (Bettelheim, 1989, p. 144).

With reference to the hero figure, Joseph Campbell (1968) has called attention to a typical difference between the fairy tale and the myth which seems quite significant. "The hero of the fairy tale achieves a domestic, microcosmic triumph, and the hero of myth a world-historical, macrocosmic triumph" (pp. 37–38). So, the youngest or despised child finds extraordinary powers by which to overcome personal oppressors in the fairy tale. Herein, the child, or perhaps the local community enjoys the benefits of this success. The victory of the mythic hero, however, serves a wider society. In the latter case, the triumph may even be a symbolic victory for society as a whole.

We see, then, that fables, fairytales, and myths are three deservedly distinguished subsets of folktales. The line that separates them is, however, sometimes blurred. One such indistinct line has been created when the Norse myths have been interpreted for children. In doing this, the more pessimistic tone of the myth is often modified into a more optimistic one, and the myth's ending converted from neutral or even unhappy into a happy one. Thus, in the course of creating children's stories, the idiom of myth is sometimes refashioned more to that of the fairy tale. This transformation is usually enhanced through the inclusion of an ample number of illustrations, at once brightly colored and highly fanciful. One of the very popular children's books, *Norse Gods and Giants* by Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire (1967) serves as a good example. This book and others like it offer children exciting stories that are written in language that is age appropriate, illustrations that stimulate the imagination, and at the same

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time introduce children to the world of Norse mythology. A caveat is appropriate, however. Joseph Campbell (1968) noted that the outlines of myths are subject to “damage and obscuration.” Original material may be revised to suit present beliefs, customs, or landscapes. Accidental or intentional changes may be made as secondary interpretations are invented for elements that are not understood. Let the adult reader be reminded that although these books dip cozily into the mythological waters, the waters offer much more when their true depth is sounded.

Having distinguished the myth from the other two forms of folk tales, we may now look more deeply into the core of myth itself. As suggested, the richness of myth lies beneath its surface and is revealed through metaphor. A metaphor, broadly speaking, uses figurative language. It uses a word or phrase, an idea or a situation with one literal meaning in place of another word, phrase, idea, or situation to suggest a likeness by analogy between them. Thus, one thing stands for another; often what it stands for or symbolizes is something more abstract.

Consider, for instance, the myth in which Loki, known as the trickster god, shape-shifted into a mare in order to entice a stallion away from its work, thereby thwarting the plot of a nefarious builder. This builder offered to build a wall around *Valhalla* (Odin’s hall in *Asgaard*) that would protect the gods and goddesses from the giants on the condition that if he completed it within eighteen months, Freyja (leader of the *Vanir* race of fertility gods and goddesses) would be his bride. In addition, he was to be rewarded with the sun and the moon. Following Loki’s counsel, the gods and goddesses agreed to the builder’s terms, allowing him to be helped in hauling rocks for the stronghold walls by his stallion *Svadilfari*. As the stronghold was nearing completion on time, they realized that the builder must, himself, be a giant. Remembering that it was Loki who encouraged them to accept the builder’s terms, the gods threatened Loki with mortal harm. Loki saved the day, as well as himself, when it looked as if the giant was about to collect the sun, the moon, and Freyja. Loki shape-shifted into a mare and lured *Svadilfari* from its task and into the woods, thus preventing the giant from completing the job on time. Enraged at the deception of the builder, as well as the fact, itself, that he was a giant, “Thor paid the builder his wages, and it was not the sun and moon ... but struck him such a single blow that his skull shivered into fragments” (Sturluson, 1954, p. 68).

Obviously, this myth can be understood on multiple levels from the

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literal to the metaphorically abstract. Perhaps one could read the myth as a warning about being distracted from work by erotic temptation. Or, perhaps as a caveat concerning tricksters and deceivers. Or even a warning not to wager with the gods. On a more abstract level, this myth reveals the tension between disorder and order in the universe as played out therein by a giant and the gods. If the builder had fulfilled his promise he would have won possession of the sun and the moon, respective symbols of day and night. This would have been tantamount to the end of day and night, that is, the end of time! Furthermore, by gaining Freyja as his bride he would have brought down the Vanir, the gods and goddesses of fertility! As such, this giant clearly symbolizes the forces of destruction, destruction of the order of the universe and thus chaos. But by recognizing just in time that the builder was a giant and that he was about to win, the gods provided the opportunity for Loki to thwart the giant and prevent chaos. The gods represent the forces for preservation of order in the universe. Thus, giants symbolize destruction-cum-disorder and chaos, while the gods and goddesses symbolize structure and order.

But this myth becomes even more metaphorically complex and convoluted as it continues. "Loki, however, had had such dealings with Svadilfari that some time (*sic*) later he bore a foal. It was grey and had eight legs, and amongst gods and men that horse is the best" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 68). This foal, of course, grew to be Odin's steed, *Sleipnir*. Owing to his eight legs, it can traverse air and water as easily as land. Even though Loki shape-shifted into a horse, his decision was also one of gender change. He did not shy away from taking a female form. It was nearly 700 years after this myth was written down that Freud shocked Viennese society with his declaration that human beings are basically bisexual! Does this myth suggest as much? Is the latter part of this myth a metaphor for the bisexual nature of humans? At the very least, the outcome of Loki's actions was quite desirable, even magical. At any rate, and taken as a whole, this myth bespeaks much more than a message of not letting your horse run off before the work is complete!

As we have seen, when made into a story for moral teaching, usually both short and fictitious, the metaphor assumes the form of a parable. And, if we substitute animals for the more usual human protagonists, the parable comes, then, to show its kinship with the fable.

Especially when the metaphor reveals a moral or political meaning, the metaphor is often referred to as an allegory. Allegories are sometimes

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quite lengthy. In *Ring of Power*, for example, Bolen (1992) has demonstrated quite compellingly an allegorical meaning in Wagner's *Ring Cycle* based on her perspective as a Jungian analyst. "Each of the four operas introduces variations on the main theme of power versus love and the effect of the quest for power on individuals and relationships" (p. 4). In the first opera, "Das Rheingold" ("The Rhinegold"), Bolen tells us that *Alberich* the dwarf or *Nibelung* who created the *ring of the Nibelung*, symbolizes the rejected, abused child. He comes to represent "a dark side of the personality that underlies the quest for power over others" (p. 4). The second opera, "Die Walküre" ("The Valkyrie") addresses the dynamics of the dysfunctional family caused by inequality of power and the loss of love, as Bolen interprets it. Then, in the third opera, "Siegfried," she interprets Siegfried as the successful son of a dysfunctional family who is emotionally numbed. Finally, in "Götterdämmerung" ("The Twilight of the Gods"), Siegfried takes from and then, unable to recognize love, forgets *Brunnhilde* who genuinely loves him. The allegory reveals that events set in motion can affect individuals down through the successive generations. Accepting Bolen's interpretations, we can consider each of these operas as a lengthy allegory, and the *Ring Cycle* taken as a whole, as a very lengthy allegory.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the Norse myths is the use of a special type of metaphor known as a *kenning*. A kenning is a brief metaphor often requiring the reader to know the underlying myth in order to understand it. For example, gold may be called "metal of strife." This kenning alludes to the gold and the ring which were produced by *Andvari*, a dark elf, for retribution to *Otter's* father for Loki's slaying of Otter. However, Andvari put a curse on the gold and the ring, saying that they would destroy anyone who owned them. This myth inspired both the Old Norse "Volsung Saga" and the Middle High German version which is titled *The Nibelungenlied*. Furthermore, it is this treasure and ring which are central to Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung* (Andvari = *Alberich*, the dwarf or Nibelung who created the ring of the Nibelung in "Das Rheingold") and which were a source of inspiration for Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Sometimes, however, the kenning does not require knowledge of any underlying myth, as in "steed of the waves" for ship, "destroyer of twigs" for fire, or "widow-maker" for sword.

As alluded to earlier, the legitimate claim of Norse mythology is to a particular inflection of mythological themes, not to these core themes

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themselves. These same underlying motifs are found extensively throughout many cultures. Let us, then, consider this communality, if not universality, of mythic themes. To begin, and to set a context, by the nineteenth century the public showed great interest in the parallel religious practices of the Old World and the New World.

Akin to this interest, in 1871 the anthropologist Edward Taylor reported to have found a uniform plot in hero myths. First, the hero is exposed at birth, then is saved by animals or other humans, and finally grows up to become a national hero. Just a few years later, Johann Georg von Hahn claimed that all Aryan hero tales followed a plan of exposure and return. Based on the examination of fourteen such myths, he presented a model that was more comprehensive than that of Tylor (Segal, 2004). In a similar vein, around 1885, Jacob Grimm (1966) of the Grimm brothers wrote extensively about folktales which he found represented in many and diverse cultures. In each case specifics differed, but the story was of the same essence. Just over forty years after Grimm's work, Vladimir Propp demonstrated that "Russian fairy tales follow a common biographical plot in which the hero goes off on a successful adventure and upon his return marries and gains the throne" (Segal, 2004, p. vii).

Robert A. Segal (2004) has opined that of the scholars who have demonstrated formulas for hero myths, three stand out because of their theorizing, in addition to delineating patterns in these myths. He named Otto Rank, a Freudian apostle; mythologist Joseph Campbell, a kindred soul of Jung; and the folklorist Lord Raglan, with views compatible with those of James Frazer who had connected hero myths to ritualistic regicide.

In 1909, Rank published *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, in which he established a common plot for myths, boldly implying that all myths can be viewed as hero myths. At the time of this publication, Rank was still allied with Freud, and agreed that myths are disguised symbolic fulfillment of repressed, usually Oedipal wishes. Freud had earlier presented his analysis of Oedipus in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Rank eventually departed the Freudian camp and developed his own theory (Segal, 2004). To pursue that theory would take us too far afield, however.

The more recent and more widely known contribution to the study of universal myths is, of course, Joseph Campbell's (1968) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In this scholarly work, he examined in detail the hero myths throughout the world. Despite their variety of incident, setting, and costume, Campbell derived a universal pattern in these myths. He referred

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to this pattern or formula as the *nuclear unit of the monomyth* (borrowing the word monomyth from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*). In each case, "the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation—initiation—return (p. 30). In each case, there is a separation or departure from home, dangerous trials and the victory of initiation, then a return and reintegration. Upon return, the hero may be honored, or unrecognized, even disdained.

In his very readable book *Parallel Myths*, J.F. Bierlein (1994) explored several myths as they are represented in parallel forms across quite diverse cultures. He noted that early European explorers discovered that various cultures of Africa, Asia, and the Americas had both myths and religious practices that were strikingly similar to their own. The conquistadors, for example, wrote of parallels between their own Catholicism and the religion they found in the Incan empire of Peru and Bolivia. As further example, early Jesuit missionaries to Japan found that one of the Buddhist sects practiced there, Pure Land, seemed surprisingly similar to European Lutheranism.

This begs the question as to how a finite set of myths can be represented in diverse cultures separated in some cases by thousands of miles. Early explanations included the spreading of myth by the Lost Tribes of Israel, or by a journey to Peru by St. Thomas. Another early suggestion was that non-European religions were simply corruptions of Catholicism at the hand of the devil! Two views that are more widely accepted have been expressed, however. One is that of *diffusion*, or the view that "the myths were produced in a few myth-creating areas, such as India, and thence passed through contact between cultures during the earliest times" (Bierlein, 1994, p. 270–271). This view suggests that as armies sought to conquer and merchants traveled the ancient trade routes, various and diverse cultures came in contact and learned each other's myths.

The second view of how diverse and widely separated cultures came to embrace myths that contained a common core or essence is that of *polygenesis*. This term, of course, means "many origins," but the term itself offers no explanation of how this could happen. Perhaps the most appealing theory of the polygenesis of myths is one that is usually attributed to Carl Jung, the collective unconscious. But as we shall see, this theory had roots prior to his more elaborate expression of it.

Adolf Bastian, impressed by the parallels among the myths of Africa,

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Asia, and South America, was one of the first to suggest that this phenomenon was common to all human beings in all cultures and throughout all times. By way of refinement of this suggestion, he distinguished between *Elementary Thought* and *People's Thought*. By Elementary Thought he meant basic mythic patterns common to all people, perhaps accounted for by shared brain structure and function. People's thought, on the other hand, was his term for inflections of the basic mythic pattern peculiar to a particular people at a particular historical period (Bierlein, 1994). Bastian's outstanding contribution is his idea of a possibly biologically based universal or collective element to myth, a spiritual or psychic germinal disposition, as distinct from its specific cultural manifestation.

As a highly influential French anthropologist, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl contributed by suggesting that there are certain characters and plots that can be found in the myths of all people. He used the terms *motifs* and *representations collectives* for these universals.

French sociologist Émile Durkeim wrote of the importance of myth as a powerful agent of morality and societal coherence. Perhaps more importantly, and consistent with the views of Bastian, he advanced the idea that the neurologically based functions of the brain account for the same plots and characters in myth, irrespective of time or place. Durkeim referred to this communality of plot and character as the *collective consciousness*.

Continuing to trace the history of thought concerning myth, Bierlein (1994) wrote as follows:

Following the "Elementary Thought" advanced by Bastian, the "conscious collective" of Durkeim, and the "representations collectives" of Lévy-Bruhl, Jung believed in the "collective unconscious," that every human being carries an inborn, neurologically based element of the unconscious that is manifested in dreams and myth [p. 291–292].

Jung saw evidence for the motifs of the *collective unconscious* not only in myths, but in dreams, art, and the hallucinations of psychotic individuals. In his writing, he referred to the elements of the collective unconscious as *imagoes* or *primordial images*, but most often as *archetypes*. With typical erudite style, Jung wrote that when represented, the "underlying creative forces" of these elements are "irrational, symbolistic currents that run through the whole history of mankind, and are so archaic in character that it is not difficult to find their parallels in archaeology and comparative religion" (Jung, 1966, p. 50). Although not using the term, herein, Campbell (1972) referred to archetypes as follows:



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They speak, therefore, not of outside events but of themes of the imagination. And since they exhibit features that are actually universal, they must in some way represent features of our general racial imagination, permanent features of the human spirit—or, as we say today, of the psyche [p. 26].

Some of the complexity of Jung's presentation of his concept of the archetype has been reduced by Richard Sharf (2004) in this explanation. "Archetypes are images with form but not content. Symbols are the content and thus the outward expression of archetypes. Archetypes can be expressed only through symbols that occur in dreams, fantasies, visions, myths, fairy tales, art, and so forth" (p. 87). Sharf's clarification is surely deserving of re-reading and contemplation. Notice the cluster of fields where archetypal symbols may play. In particular, regard the apposition of dreams and myths.

Joseph Campbell, too, noted the affinity of myths and dreams. For "the patterns and logic of fairy tale and myth correspond to those of dream" (Campbell, 1968, p. 255). So much is this the case, according to Campbell, that the "dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream" (p. 19). This to-and-fro statement echoes Karl Abraham, a contemporary of Freud and Jung, who "considered the myth as the dream of a people" (Silberer, 1965, p. 213). Campbell acknowledged with appreciation not only the work of Freud and Jung, but that of Wilhelm Stekel, Otto Rank, Karl Abraham, and Géza Róheim in the development of the lore of dream and myth interpretation.

Otto Rank (2004) called attention to the next step which is implied by the recognition of the intimate relationship between myths and dreams. In his words:

The intimate relationship between dream and myth—not only as to content but also as to form and to the motor forces of these and many other psychic structures, especially pathological ones—entirely justifies the interpretation of myth as a "mass dream" of the people.... At the same time, the transference of the method, and in part also of the results, of Freud's technique of dream interpretation to the myths seems justified, as argued and illustrated by Abraham [1909, p. 6].

Returning to the concept of the archetype, and by way of both step-by-step summary and further clarification, I offer the following: The structure (anatomy) of the human brain has not evolved appreciably in the past several thousand years. So, we all share the same basic neural anatomy. Function (mind, if you will) derives from this structure. Therefore, by virtue of being human, we all share the tendency to certain patterns of



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thought. These universal patterns (archetypes) are expressed through symbolic images. The specific images are dressed in the style of the physical and cultural environment that we know. Thus arise the cultural inflections of the symbols of the universal mythic themes.

Allow me some examples of cultural inflection. One of the universal elements in world mythologies is the creation myth, a story of how the universe came into being and how the earth became peopled. In many of these, the tree plays an important role in the origination of humans. "To the Norse, Sioux, Algonquins, and Persians it is from the tree that man is created" (Bierlein, 1994, p. 88). First, let us look at the Zoroastrian story from Persia (now Iran):

Ormazd is the Wise Lord, the eternal and omniscient source of all that is good. His opposite and the enemy of all creation is Ahriman, the source of all suffering, sin and death.... Ormazd created all living things ... Ormazd's last creations were Gayomart, the first man, and his ox. One of Ahriman's wicked attendants, a demoness named Joshi, volunteered to make Gayomart and his ox suffer and die.... When he died, his shining body decomposed, depositing gold and silver in the earth. From his sperm, a tiny plant grew into a great tree that bore as its fruit the ten races of mankind. The tree separated, and the male part became a man named Mashya, and the female became his wife, Mashyane [pp. 41–43].

In brief, Glooskap of the Algonquins "formed man from the trunk of an ash tree, and the elves from its bark" (Bierlein, 1994, p. 46). Additionally, he "answers requests for eternal life by turning suppliants into trees or stones" (Leach, 1984, p. 456).

Turning, then to the story of the Sioux:

One day when a large snake had crawled into the nest of the bird to eat his eggs, one of the eggs hatched out in a clap of thunder, and the Great Spirit, catching hold of a piece of the pipestone to throw at the snake, moulded (*sic*) into a man. This man's feet grew fast in the ground where he stood for many ages, like a great tree, and therefore he grew very old; he was older than a hundred men at the present day; and at last another tree grew up by the side of him, when a large snake ate them both off at the roots, and they wandered off together; from these have sprung all the people that now inhabit earth [Bierlein, 1994, p. 59].

Finally, the Norse texts tell this etiological tale of which I will give greater detail: When the sparks and glowing embers from *Muspell* in the south met with the ice and hoar frost from *Niflheim* in the north, coming together in *Ginnungagap* (Open Void), the ice thawed and dripped. From the drops of this running fluid, life appeared in the likeness of a man. He was *Ymir*, source of all of the frost ogres. While he slept, he fell into a

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sweat. From under his left arm a man and woman grew, while a son emerged from one of his legs. Thus arose the families of frost ogres. And, as the frost thawed, it formed into a cow called *Audhumla*. She licked the salty ice-blocks and in three days' time a man emerged from these. His name was *Buri*, and he had a son named *Bor*. Bor married *Bestla*, daughter of the giant *Bölthorn*. Their three sons were Odin, *Vili*, and *Vé*. These three killed Ymir and from his body formed the world. From his blood they formed the sea and the lakes; from his flesh, the earth; from his bones, the mountains; rocks and pebbles from his teeth and jaws and pieces of broken bone. With his skull they fashioned the sky and set it over the earth, supported at the four corners by dwarfs, *Nordri* (north), *Sudri* (south), *Austri* (east), and *Vestri* (west). Taking stray sparks blown out of Muspell, the brothers gave their stations in the sky to all the stars. To this, Snorri (Sturluson, 1954, p. 36) added,

From his eyebrows  
the blessed gods  
made Midgard for the sons of men,  
and from his brains  
were created  
all storm-threatening clouds.

With these aspects of the world now in place, we have the context for the creation of humans. As Odin, Vili, and Vé walked the seashore, they found two trees, one an ash-tree and the other probably an elm. They picked them up and created humans from these trees.

The first gave them spirit and life; the second, understanding and power of movement; the third, form, speech, hearing and sight. They gave them clothes and names. The man was *Ask* and the woman *Embla*, and from them have sprung the races of men who were given *Midgard* to live in [Sturluson, 1954, p. 37].

Stripped of their cultural inflections, we find then, in these four creation stories, the mythic theme of the tree as progenitor of humankind. Perhaps, long ago, people noticed that in their natural world mainly two things attained verticality, the tree and upright man. That the human mind has a penchant for associating things on the basis of observed similarity has been recognized, we know, at least from the time of the ancient Greeks, and it seems likely that this recognition, even if not written down, is much, much older than that. So, early people may have found these two upright forms, tree and human, to be affined through analogy. Such is

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reflected in our language. Trees can reach out their limbs high above their crotches, and humans stand as solid as oaks, or children reminded to stand up with trunk straight and limbs at their sides, crowns of their heads held high, tall as a tree. The practitioner of some of the Oriental martial arts is instructed to give and sway like the bamboo when meeting force, while we carve faces on trees and speak, then, of the *Green Man*. Some work to record their family tree, thereby creating a graphic image of the branches of their family and a sense of their roots. Those given either to ecological concerns or to certain spiritual pursuits may come to be found hugging a tree, thus gaining a body sense of oneness with the tree. And, body sense is only too real if you bark your shin! So, not only are limbs and crotches, crowns and trunks, and bark semantically shared, but uprightness, branches, and roots! Yet, there is a third. Less ubiquitous, if not less consistent, is the erection of a man lying on his back. Perhaps, then, the three primeval images fused in the minds of some early people. Tree, person, phallus. What concept neatly fuses them? Creation of humans. Georg Groddeck (1961), a psychoanalyst writing in 1923, suggested these connections:

The tree, if you are considering its trunk, is a phallus symbol, one that is quite respectable and sanctioned by custom, for even the primmest miss is not too shy to contemplate her family tree upon the wall, although she must know that the hundred organs of procreation of all her ancestors are leaping out at her from the picture [p. 210].

Too abstract, too far-fetched, too complicated? Not so for the dreamer, the surrealist, or the psychoanalyst. And not for the erstwhile shamans and skalds who held commerce with myth.

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# Norse Mythology as Cynosure

Norse mythology offers a strikingly rich and rather complex cosmology. By exploring this particular view of the universe, a view which speaks metaphorically, we may find both orientation and guidance. In this view of the cosmos, looking specifically at its physical structure or cosmography, the universe is constituted of nine worlds, arranged on three levels. Sometimes this arrangement is referred to as an upper world, a middle world and a lower or netherworld with nine realms or worlds allocated to these three. *Yggdrasil*, the *Cosmic Tree*, connects these three planes. As revealed by the *Edda*, “Nine worlds I know, the nine abodes of the glorious world-tree” (Hollander, 1962, p. 2). That tree being “the ash Yggdrasil” (Sturluson, 1954, p. 42).

Such a three-level universe, or *empyrean trilogy*, connected by the *axis mundi* (*Cosmic Axis*, *Cosmic Tree*, *World Pillar*, or *World Tree*), is the rule among the mythologies of shamanistic societies. Although shamanism was not dominant in the magico-religious life of the Germanic peoples of the Norse religion, many shamanic elements are in evidence. This cosmography based on the empyrean trilogy with its World Tree, is one such marrowy element.

As for the nine worlds of the Norse cosmos, we are told of *Asgaard*, home of the *Aesir* (*Æsir*) or warrior gods and goddesses; *Vanaheim*, home of the fertility or *Vanir* gods and goddesses; and *Alfheim*, home of *Light Elves*. These three realms are located in “the heavens above” (Hollander, 1962, p. 45), called “‘Heaven’ among men, and ‘Upper World’ by the giants” (p. 112).

*Midgaard*, realm of humankind and *Jötunheim*, land of the giants (*jötuns*, *etins*, *thurses*), are in the middle world. The neat order of the

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cosmos that seems to be emerging breaks down, however, as we proceed to catalog and locate the remaining worlds. *Svartalfheim*, home of the *Dark Elves* or *Dwarfs*, is placed in the middle world by many mythologists. However, Douglas “Dag” Rossman, storyteller and author of the *Nine Worlds Sagas* places them in a lower world giving the impression of a four level universe. This apparent arrangement is depicted graphically, for instance, in his *The Dragonseeker Saga* (Rossman, 2009) and his *Way of the Elves* (2012).

Interestingly, D’Aulaires’ *Norse Gods and Giants* (D’Aulaire & D’Aulaire, 1967) places a “World of the Gnomes” next to “Darkalf Heim.” Furthermore, Kevin Crossley-Holland (1980) in his *The Norse Myths* suggests that the Dark Elves and the Dwarfs are two distinct peoples, with the latter dwelling in *Nidavellir* in the middle world along with the Dark Elves. Cheryl Evans and Anne Millard (1986) followed Crossley-Holland’s suggestion in their *Usborne Illustrated Guide to Norse Myths and Legends*, placing *Nidavellir* along with *Svartalfheim* in the middle world.

*Niflheim*, Hel’s abode, a cold, dark land of sleet and ice, is definitely located in the underworld, as is Hel if Hel is interpreted as an eponym or name of a place as well as the personified guardian of that realm. The term *Niflhel* need not add to the tangle of terms if we accept Hollander’s (1962) interpretation of the term as a synonym for *Niflheim*.

Finally, there is *Muspell* (*Muspellheim*, *Muspelheim*), a land of fire guarded by *Surt*, a fire-giant, which is most often placed in the underworld. However, Crossley-Holland (1980) omits it entirely, leaving only two realms at the lowest level, Hel and *Niflheim*. He did, however, concede, “if Hel and *Niflheim* comprised one world, ... the ninth world may have been *Muspellheim*, the land of fire” (p. xxii). Interestingly, Rossman, in the above mentioned sources, places *Muspellheim* in the middle world.

What stability we see in this cosmography is somewhat remarkable, in itself, when we consider the several hundred years over which this mythology evolved and the number of skalds involved in its telling. What is consensual is that Asgaard, Vanaheim, and Alfheim are in the upper world, Midgaard and Jötunheim in the middle world, and *Niflheim* in the lower world. Then there is the issue of spelling, as the original Old Norse has been translated into various languages. Setting aside the scholarly debates as to the arrangement of the nine worlds, I will state my preference. The following organization, I believe, can be justified by a careful

## 2. Norse Mythology as Cynosure

reading of the several best known translations of the *Poetic Edda* and Snorri's (*Prose*) *Edda*.

### Upper World

Asgaard  
Vanaheim  
Alfheim

### Middle World

Midgaard  
Svartalfheim  
Jötunheim

### Lower World

Niflheim  
Muspell  
Hel

We are told that Yggdrasil stands at the center of the cosmos and unites it. Its limbs spread over all the nine worlds and it is held in position by three great roots. As this is presented in *The Poetic Edda* (Hollander, 1962):

The roots do spread      in threefold ways  
                         beneath the ash Yggdrasil:  
dwell etins 'neath one,      'neath the other, Hel,  
                         'neath the third; Mithgarth's men [p. 59].

However, in his *Prose Edda*, Snorri offers a divergent description. "The tree is held in position by three roots that spread far out; one is among the Æsir, the second among the frost ogres ... and the third extends over Niflheim" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 43). So, in the chronologically earlier version, Midgaard, Jötunheim, and Hel are the anchoring points, the worlds of humans, giants, and some of the dead (the complex issue as to which of the dead are claimed by Hel will be explained later in the discussion of the chthonic realm). In Snorri's later version, the roots connect the worlds of gods and goddesses, the giants, and some of the dead. Of the two versions, it is Snorri's that is the more orderly, the one that surely will appeal more to those who seek a neater cosmography wherein the roots of Yggdrasil connect the three levels of the empyrean trilogy. On the other hand, having no root in the upper worlds of gods, goddesses, and light elves suggests that they dwell in the crown or canopy of the World Tree.

Regardless of which version one may favor, it is clear that Yggdrasil connects the worlds, and therefore assumes a major importance in the cosmography. Recognizing this central role of Yggdrasil, Bolen (1992) has

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suggested from her Jungian perspective that “the world ash tree is a symbol of the Self, the archetype of wholeness” (p. 216). Her statement concerning the Self and the archetype of wholeness is clearly consistent with the core concept of the present book; Norse cosmography can be viewed as a metaphor of human consciousness.

Further clue is also given concerning the relationship of the worlds. Note that each of the three levels contains two worlds having the suffix *heim*, meaning home. The upper and middle levels each has a realm with the suffix *gaard* which can be translated variously as courtyard, homestead, farmstead, or yard. This wording may suggest that Asgaard, Midgaard, and perhaps Hel form a vertical axis of balance among the three levels. It may also reflect the important fact that Asgaard is the realm of Odin, leader of the gods and goddesses, Midgaard the realm of humankind, and Hel, (along with Odin and three goddesses to be discussed later), one of the five who choose the destiny of the dead. It is understandable that the creators of this mythology would see themselves at the very center of the universe. After death, their fate would be to rise to the upper world or descend to the lower world, along the central axis. This eventuality imparts compelling importance to the worlds of Odin and of Hel.

Taken as a whole, we can regard the nine worlds as an ecological system of three worlds within each of three levels. Opposition and synergistic balance can be recognized among the nine worlds as well as among the levels. Already, synergy and balance should be evident and implied by the terms upper world, middle world, and lower world. The recognition of the nine worlds into opposing and synergizing pairs will be dealt with in detail subsequently.

Furthermore, each of the nine worlds can be recognized as a metaphor for some aspect of overall human consciousness. After all, given that this universe of Norse mythology was created by human beings, it is by definition a product of their imagination and thus born of their projections. Into each world they projected certain aspects of their experience of being. Not only does each world symbolize certain human qualities, but each sentient being within that world is a personification of those qualities. Or we might conceive of each world as representing a particular force field or energy field, with beings who manifest that respective energy. Particularly in the worlds of the gods and goddesses, we find an impressive array of quite specific individual qualities. Thus, generally speaking, each god and goddess displays a unique consciousness in addition to the general

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consciousness dictated by membership in the society of Asgaard or of Vanaheim.

At this point, an exploration of consciousness, itself, may be useful, if not necessary for the furthering of this understanding. Psychologists have distinguished *states* of consciousness, *levels* of consciousness, and *stages* of consciousness. In general, state of consciousness refers to the experience of being awake, being asleep, or being in an altered state. Alterations in consciousness may be brought about through the use of a variety of substances and procedures. The substances include both mind-altering or psychedelic drugs (natural or synthetic) and drugs that, although prescribed for other purposes, have mind-altering side-effects. Procedures for producing an altered state of conscious include various meditation techniques, hypnosis, sleep deprivation, sensory deprivation, fasting, dehydration, extended social isolation, creation of pain, whirling like a dervish, and so forth. The important role of alteration of consciousness in Norse mythology will be explored subsequently.

Level of consciousness is identified with a particular perspective, a particular way of experiencing the world. Usually, level of consciousness refers to the vertical arrangement of two or more world views judged on a scale of wisdom and virtue. Higher consciousness, then, is usually associated with what is regarded as a spiritual perspective, one which has been arrived at through some form of spiritual initiation or practice. Virtually all, if not all religions incorporate some sort of disciplined practice for the development of such higher levels of consciousness. These practices often include the use of an altered state of consciousness brought about through procedures such as those mentioned above.

When two or more levels of consciousness are named and arranged in a set order from lower to higher, and particularly when different practices or intensities of practice are prescribed for movement from one level to the next, we speak of stages of consciousness. Stages are, then, recognized steps toward a goal of greatly enhanced consciousness. Perhaps the best known example is the *chakra* model found in the Hindu practices of yoga. Different forms of yoga have prescribed methods for advancing upward through seven metaphorical energy centers arranged along the spine from the root chakra located at the base of the spine to the crown chakra at the top of the head. Each chakra represents a different energy field or way of experiencing the world. Each level is considered more desirable as the yoga practitioner rises toward spiritual enlightenment.



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I suggest that not only is the alteration of conscious an important element in Norse mythology, but that the cosmography of Norse mythology can be understood beneficially in terms of levels of consciousness. As I understand it, however, it is not best viewed in terms of stages of consciousness. There is no evidence within the corpus of the mythology that suggests a working of one's way from world to world through sacred practice. In the following, I will however, present evidence for the use of mind-altering procedures as well as how the cosmography offers an intriguing map of the mind, nine worlds of consciousness.

## The Lower World

### *Niflheim, Muspell and Hel*

In most of the world's mythologies, the nether world has been regarded both with mystery and with foreboding. This is true, as well, for Norse mythology. As we have seen, scholars have not reached consensus as to which realms belong here, for the ancient manuscripts are unclear, if not inconsistent. My preference, as I have indicated, is to side with those scholars who place Muspell, Niflheim, and Hel in this lower region.

### *Niflheim and Muspell*

Here in the lower world, Muspell and Niflheim stand in opposition, in dynamic tension, if you will. Insofar as this is such an important aspect of their existence, much of the following discussion will deal with them jointly. We are told that Muspell is to the south, while Niflheim is to the north, the geographical directions which took the pre-Vikings and Vikings to warmer and colder climates, respectively. Muspell is a place of fire, we are told, and Niflheim a place of ice. "Just as cold and all harsh things emanated from Niflheim, so everything in the neighborhood of Muspell was warm and bright" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 33). Thus, Muspell represents heat and light, while Niflheim represents the cold and darkness. We might logically extend these qualities to include heat, light, sound, and movement on the one hand, and cold, dark, quiet, and stillness on the other hand.

Looking to its cosmogenesis, we find that the universe came into being when sparks from Muspell met ice from Niflheim. In the beginning there was only the primordial void, Ginnungagap. The part of Ginnungagap to the north became full of ice as result of the cold from Niflheim,

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while that part toward the south received sparks and glowing embers from Muspell. "The first world to exist, however, was Muspell" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 32). As the heat came in contact with the ice, the ice melted and from that flow was formed the likeness of a man, Ymir the first frost giant. As the frost thawed, it formed a cow, Audhumla, and from her teats flowed four rivers of milk. Thereby Ymir was fed. Following this, there is a complex development leading to the completion of the cosmos and the creation of its inhabitants. (Recall this cosmogony as it was discussed above in the context of parallel creation myths.) We would do well to note the primal role of Niflheim in juxtaposition to Muspell. This netherworld is a realm of opposition, the fires of Muspell in the south in dynamic tension with the ice of Niflheim to the north.

In this cosmogenesis we see the importance of Muspell and Niflheim as sources of opposite and primal qualities. Unimaginable energy of Muspell meeting the entropy of Niflheim, both being transformed to fill the primordial void of Ginnungagap. In the meeting of these antipodes, both are transformed and something entirely new is created through the destruction both of spark and of ice. As with the dialectic of Hegel, the encounter of thesis and antithesis gave rise to a higher order synthesis. Thus, we can look upon the Netherworld as a symbol of primal energy in creative transformation. Note that Muspell preceded Niflheim in the cosmogony. Energy preceded entropy. It is, too, a metaphor for all opposites in dynamic relationship: hot and cold, creation and destruction, male and female, wet and dry, hard and soft, and so forth. The metaphor further suggests that creation is found not at the extremes, but in a central zone where opposites come together in transformation. That zone is one of balance and moderation, relative to the extremes.

From the *Poetic Edda* we learn that Surt dwells in Muspell. Come *Ragnarök*, the time of the destruction of the universe, Surt with fiery sword and his army will join the Jötun army to march upon the gods. "He will come and harry and will vanquish all the gods and burn the whole world with fire" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 32). So, ultimately, fire comes as a force of destruction, that fire not cooled by ice. Surt is a fire-giant, in a sense a personification of the realm of Muspelheim, and a central figure in that eschaton known to the Norse as Ragnarök.

Niflheim, we know, is in opposition to Muspell, both cosmographically and energetically. The northern climes of Niflheim bring cooling and the dynamic of entropy.

### 3. *The Lower World*

With the cosmology and symbolism surrounding Muspell and Niflheim clearly in mind, let us see how these serve as a cartography of consciousness. I have established that these two lower worlds constitute an energy dimension. This chthonic level, taken as a whole, can be regarded as symbolic of instinctual life, as opposed to intellectual life which is symbolized by the two higher levels. As such, this reflects but a primal consciousness, a proto-consciousness, an instinctual consciousness, if you will, not one of intellect.

The energy dimension of personality or temperament has long been a topic of interest in psychology. A convenient place to begin with an exploration of this interest is with the work of Ivan Pavlov. In his study of conditioning in dogs, Pavlov found that there were differences in how easily a particular dog could be conditioned. You, the reader, may recall that in this classical conditioning paradigm, Pavlov found that if a dog was presented with the ringing of a bell (neutral stimulus), then within a few seconds presented with meat powder (unconditioned stimulus), the dog would of course salivate (unconditioned response), and after several pairings of the bell and the meat powder, the dog would come to salivate (conditioned response) when presented with the bell alone (conditioned stimulus). The dog had then been conditioned to the sound of the bell; the bell evoked the physiological response that had previously been elicited only by the meat powder. Pavlov classified his dogs into four categories based on their quickness or ease of conditioning, seeing these categories as representing differences in temperament or types of nervous systems. In doing so, he borrowed terminology and to some degree conceptually from the earliest known Western personality typology, that espoused by Galen in his further systematization of the work of Hippocrates.

In his *On the Temperaments*, Galen extended Hippocrates's humoral theory of human constitution and disease susceptibility, to behavioral and emotional inclinations. In this Hippocrates-Galen theory, temperamental characteristics were attributed to the effects of four bodily fluids or cardinal *humors*, namely *black bile (melancholy)*, *phlegm*, *blood*, and *yellow bile (choler)*. These humors were related to what were seen as the four basic natural elements, black bile with earth, phlegm with water, blood with air (or sometimes all four elements), and yellow bile with fire. From this it was derived that black bile represents cold and dry; phlegm, cold and wet; blood, hot and wet; and yellow bile, hot and dry. They believed

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further that *eucrasia* or health ensued from an optimal balance of the four humors. Conversely, *dyscrasia* or ill-health was the result of an imbalance of the humors. To wit, an excess of black bile resulted in *melancholica*, an excess of phlegm in *phlegmatica*, an excess of blood in *sanguinica*, and an excess of yellow bile in *cholericica*. As indicated above, these would constitute types of disease proneness and behavioral and emotional inclinations. In order to understand the related diseases, themselves, would require a perhaps tedious side excursion into the names and classification employed at this earlier time. We can, however, relate the theory to adjectives of personality quite readily. Thus, the melancholy person, the phlegmatic, the sanguine, and the bilious. This material is graphically summarized as follows:

<i>Cholericica</i>	<i>Sanguinica</i>	<i>Phlegmatica</i>	<i>Melancholica</i>
Yellow bile	Blood	Phlegm	Black bile
Fire	Air	Water	Earth
Hot and dry	Hot and wet	Cold and wet	Cold and dry
Bilious	Sanguine	Phlegmatic	Melancholy

To reiterate, Pavlov conceptualized the ease or difficulty of conditioning a specific dog in terms of the dog's temperament. Temperament was, in his view, a function of the type of nervous system of the dog. Here is where he applied some aspects of the humoral theory. Following Hippocrates and Galen, he classified his dogs into four types, two extreme types and two central or equilibrated types. The extreme types were the inhibitory type and the excitatory type, corresponding to the melancholic and choleric, respectively. The quiet type and the lively type, the two central or equilibrated types, correspond to the phlegmatic and the sanguine, respectively. This dimension of temperamental type was, then, defined by Pavlov in terms of excitation and inhibition in the nervous system. Clearly, an energy dynamic is implied here. Bear with a somewhat complex but important refinement. Pavlov required three fundamental nervous system properties to account for individual differences in conditioning. First, strength of excitation or inhibition. Second, balance or equilibrium between excitation and inhibition, defined as the ratio between their relative strengths. And third, mobility of excitation and inhibition. By this he meant the ability of the nervous system to respond adequately to continuous changes in the environment (Ruch, 1992).

Pavlov was not averse to extrapolating from his research with dogs

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to humans. Already, as we have seen, he borrowed conceptually from Hippocrates and especially from Galen who had championed a theory of human temperament. Using, of course, the nosology of his own time, Pavlov related the inhibitory type to the melancholic who “believes in nothing, hopes for nothing, in everything sees the dark side” (Wolman, 1960, p. 61). Exaggerated emotion or excitement, on the other hand, were symptomatic of the choleric and therefore related by Pavlov to his pugnacious and passionate excitatory type. As for the healthy types, the phlegmatic is “self-contained and quiet, persistent and steadfast” while the sanguinic (*sic*) is “energetic and very productive” but without stimulation may get bored and falls asleep easily (p. 61).

In applying the Pavlovian model to humans, we can say that in general, the melancholy person can be characterized as devoid of energy, while the phlegmatic person is stolidly calm. Moving along the continuum from the side of inhibition toward that of excitation, the sanguine person is optimistic and positive with optimal energy, and the choleric person is irritable if not hypomaniac. The translation of inhibition as the lowering of the level of energy and the translation of excitation as the raising of energy level is an easy enough step.

Well after Pavlov, psychologists have continued to call upon aspects of the Hippocrates-Galen model in their work (Ruch, 1992). One example is that of H.J. Eysenck in which, using sophisticated statistical methodologies, he has integrated the Hippocrates-Galen model of temperament with his research findings on the dimension of extroversion-introversion and on the functioning of the parasympathetic and sympathetic divisions of the autonomic nervous system (PANS and SANS, respectively). He has related extroversion and introversion to the activity of the brain’s ascending reticular formation (reticular activating system, RAS) and in so doing has offered somewhat different definitions of these terms from the ones commonly given them. For Eysenck, the key is that extroverts, because of ascending reticular formation inhibition of incoming stimuli, operate with a stimulus hunger. Thus, they are more “out there,” seeking stimulation. Conversely, introverts have ascending reticular formations which let in more stimulation and are therefore more vulnerable to overstimulation. Then, by defining stability-instability in terms of respective parasympathetic-sympathetic dominance within the autonomic nervous system, Eysenck derived the following model (Hampden-Turner, 1981):

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<i>Choleric</i>	<i>Sanguine</i>	<i>Phlegmatic</i>	<i>Melancholic</i>
Unstable	Stable	Stable	Unstable
Extrovert	Extrovert	Introvert	Introvert
SANS	PANS	PANS	SANS

If we look to schools of psychotherapy, more specifically to the schools of psychoanalytic thinking, we can find a wealth of material relative to energy and personality. First, as for the doyen of psychoanalysis himself, Sigmund Freud concerned himself with the energy that motivates or drives human behavior, an energy he called *libido*. Perhaps nowhere is the complexity of psychoanalytic theory more apparent than in Freud's theories surrounding this psychic energy. Hopefully I will be able in what follows to offer the reader a sufficient understanding of Freud's theory concerning energy without getting bogged down in unnecessary technical detail. In order to understand Freud's concept of libido we need to place it in the context of his instinct theory. More accurately, we should say instinct theories, for Freud revised his theory twice, resulting in three related but distinctly different theories.

In his initial theory, articulated in 1905, Freud posited two basic categories of human instincts, namely the sexual instincts and the ego instincts. Running parallel with the contemporary view of instincts in biology, Freud's sexual instincts correspond with the reproductive instinct and his ego instincts with the instinct for self-preservation. At this time, he distinguished object (sexual) libido and narcissistic (ego) libido. Later, in 1914, he suggested that self-preservation is but a specialized case of preservation of the species, making the sexual instincts the primary and ruling ones. In his 1920 revision, influenced by further clinical experience and the atrocities of World War I, Freud put forward a theory of the sexual or life instincts and the ego or death instincts. The metaphorically derived terms for these two categories of instincts are Eros, after the Greek god of sexual love, and Thanatos, the Greek's name for Death, himself. Concerning his final formulation, written a year before his death in 1939, Freud wrote:

After long doubts and vacillations we have decided to assume the existence of only two basic instincts, Eros and the destructive instinct. (The contrast between the instincts of self-preservation and of the preservation of the species, as well as the contrast between ego-love and object-love, fall within the bounds of Eros.) The aim of the first of these basic instincts is to establish ever greater unities and to preserve them thus—in short, to bind together; the aim of the second, on the contrary, is to undo connections and so to destroy things. We may suppose that the final aim of

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the destructive instinct is to reduce living things to an inorganic state. For this reason we also call it the death instinct [Freud, 1963, p. 20].

Paul Federn offered the term *mortido* to identify the energy that drives the death instinct. He did not, however, follow up with an explanation of how the two instinctual energies, libido and mortido, co-exist or interact, nor did the latter term ever become widely accepted within psychoanalysis (Rycroft, 1968). Other psychoanalysts did, however, in time, explore such interactions. A further detail, puzzling if not trivial, is the rare appearance in the literature of *destrudo* as a term for the energy of the death instinct, analogous to libido of the life instinct.

This final, classical psychoanalytic formulation concerning the instincts is in part summarized by Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindzey (1970) as follows:

An important derivative of the death instincts is the aggressive drive. Aggressiveness is self-destruction turned outward against substitute objects. A person fights with other people and is destructive because his death wish is blocked by the forces of the life instincts and by other obstacles in his personality which counteract the death instincts.

... aggression [is] as sovereign a motive as sex. The life and death instincts and their derivatives may fuse together, neutralize each other, or replace one another. Eating, for example, represents a fusion of hunger and destructiveness which is satisfied by biting, chewing, and swallowing food. Love, a derivative of the sex instinct, can neutralize hate, a derivative of the death instinct. Or love can replace hate, and hate love [p. 39].

Freud set the parameters of an instinct as being a *source*, an *aim*, an *object*, and an *impetus*. The source is a somatic need, the psychological representation of which is a wish. The aim is removal of the state of tension that is set up by the bodily need. The object “refers not only to the particular thing or condition which will satisfy the need but it also includes all of the behavior which takes place in securing the necessary thing or condition” (Hall & Lindzey, 1970, p. 37). The impetus, then, refers to the force or strength which is determined by the intensity of the underlying need. This model is, clearly, a tension reduction model, a model of repeated arising, processing, and the passing away of tension. This aspect of the instinct is referred to as *repetition compulsion*.

As a further and final aspect of Freud's theory concerning libidinal energy, let us consider his idea of *cathexis*. This refers to the investment of psychic energy or libido in an object. The term object includes persons, as clearly demonstrated by the phrase “the object of my affection.” When



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an object is chosen, that object is cathected. Conversely, the removal or de-investment of libido is termed *de-cathexis*, the object being thereby de-cathected.

The psychoanalytic view that has emerged as predominant is of two basic instincts, sex and aggression. These are primal motivations and all other human motivations derive from them as *instinct derivatives*. The energy that fires these instincts and their derivatives is that of libido.

In contrast to classical psychoanalysis, with its strong focus on the Id as the seat of the instincts (sex and aggression), ego psychology, as the name suggests, shifted its emphasis to the ego. "Ego theory not only embraces such topics as the development of the reality principle in childhood, the integrative or synthesizing functions of the ego, the auxiliary ego processes of perceiving, remembering, thinking, and acting, and the defenses of the ego but, more important, it has put forward the concept of the autonomy of the ego" (Hall & Lindzey, 1970, pp. 62–63). Autonomous functioning means that ego processes can be independent of purely instinctual objectives. A corollary is the *conflict-free sphere of the ego*; rather than being limited to the mediation of intrapsychic conflicts born of opposition among id impulses, the moralistic demands of the superego, and the reality demands of the external world, the ego is able to function in a conflict-free sphere. The implication of this is that the ego defenses are not necessarily pathological or negative in character; they may serve healthy purposes. Rather than being limited to combating the instincts, the ego defenses, not only sublimation, but denial, displacement, intellectualization, introjection, isolation, projection, reaction formation, regression, repression, and undoing may serve the functions of organization and adjustment. A modicum of denial, repression, rationalization, and so forth may be healthy when used to cope with a difficult reality, as opposed to threats from within.

For our consideration of energy, the ego defense of *sublimation* is of particular import. In classical psychoanalytic thinking, sublimation was considered the only relatively healthy defense mechanism. By substituting a more socially acceptable outlet for the expression of one's raw sexual or aggressive urges, sublimation allows for a partial discharge of energy and a return to a state closer to energy equilibrium. But, to the extent that the sublimated expression is not full, a residue of tension remains. To this classical view, the ego analyst Ernst Kris added an important codicil. For Kris, sublimation involved two closely related processes: (1) goal substitu-

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tion; (2) neutralization of the energy itself. Consistent with classical psychoanalysis, the first process is one of displacement of energy discharge from a goal not socially acceptable to one that is. But in the second process, by which he meant the *de-sexualization* or *de-aggressivization* of libido, there is actually an energy transformation. Thereby, “instinctual energy may find a more or less direct or neutralized discharge; the function may have become more or less autonomous” (Kris, 1952, pp. 42–43). In this view, then, it is only to the extent that neutralization is incomplete that the ego defense mechanisms may be necessary. Ego psychology has thus instructed us to include a neutralized libido in our psychoanalytic understanding of energy.

Interestingly, Robert W. White “has proposed that the ego not only has its own intrinsic energy, but that there are also intrinsic ego satisfactions which are independent of id or instinctual gratifications” (Hall & Lindzey, 1970, p. 63). Autonomous ego satisfaction can be found, for instance, in competence in performing tasks, in exploration, and in various forms of manipulation. Given that satisfaction can be found in such activities, it is but a short step to speaking of corresponding motivations such as *competence motivation*. We see then, whether as with the position of classical psychoanalysis or with that of the ego psychologists, energy is a dynamic element at the very core of their systems.

Although he was a follower of Freud, earlier, Alfred Adler broke away from the Freudian school in 1911 and developed his own theoretical system which came to be known as Individual Psychology. His theoretical structure downplayed the role of sexuality and focused on the ego as it develops in a healthy or an unhealthy manner given to complexes. Interestingly, although he maintained that humans cannot be meaningfully divided into types, he offered his interpretation of the Hippocrates-Galen four temperaments as an educational device. In Adler’s interpretation, the sanguine type is the healthiest of the four types. This person, he suggested, has not been subjected to severe deprivation or humiliation and therefore has little or no feeling of inferiority. Therefore, he or she can *strive for superiority* (Adler’s somewhat misleading term for striving to develop one’s potential) in a happy and friendly manner. The choleric, on the other hand is tense and aggressive, going about attaining her or his goals in a direct and forceful manner. This person’s striving for superiority and power involves the use of a great deal of energy and leads to rather poor social adjustment. As he saw it, the melancholic is overwhelmed with inferiority

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feelings. Therefore, he or she lacks initiative for overcoming obstacles. He or she is undecided, worried, and lacking in the self-confidence and courage to take risks. Such a person, although not antisocial, would not be inclined toward much social interaction. Finally, Adler described the phlegmatic as one who has lost contact with life, having become slow, sluggish, and unable to make the effort to strive for superiority (Wolman, 1960).

Later, even though Adler introduced his own typology, these four types bore more than passing similarity to the Hippocrates-Galen temperaments that he had earlier interpreted. Adler based his types on two dimensions, namely degree of *activity* and degree of *social interest*. The latter involves empathy and cooperation, his word being the rather intimidating *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*. A person may exhibit high activity and low social interest, thus lacking consideration for others and acting in an anti-social manner. This is Adler's dominant or *ruling type* and corresponds to the choleric type. Adler's second type is the *getting type*, lacking both initiative and consideration for others. Wanting others to take care of her or him, this is the phlegmatic type. The *avoiding type* is the third and he or she is weak in both activity and social interest. This corresponds to the melancholic who stands undecided rather than striving for superiority. Resembling the sanguine type is the *socially useful type*. Active and socially interested, he or she acts in harmony with the needs of others and is beneficial to them.

Wilhelm Reich, an early defector from the Freudian psychoanalytic movement, emphasized the role of sexuality even more directly and strongly than did Freud, thereby placing energy dynamics at the very core of his theory. To enucleate Reich's theory, using his own words, we need go no further than the following (Reich, 1980):

Orgastic potency is to be understood as the ability to achieve full resolution of existing sexual need-tension, an ability that is seldom impaired in healthy individuals. It is lacking in neurotics [p. 18]. *There is no neurosis or psychosis without disturbances of the genital function* [p. 39, emphasis in original].

Explaining Reich's position further, his student, Elsworth Baker (1967), wrote, "The orgasm is the only mechanism, except for childbirth, capable of discharging all excess energy and maintaining an economic energy level" (p. 10). He went on to present Reich's four-step orgasm model (pp. 9, 85):

Tension → Charge → Discharge → Relaxation

### 3. *The Lower World*

Life energy, which Reich termed *orgone*, is discharged through orgasm, allowing a return to a quiescent state of relaxation following the natural build-up of this energy. In his voluminous expansion of his theory, Reich explained various disorders in terms of problems of energy dynamics. The detailed complexity of Reich's theory is perforce oversimplified here.

Two of Reich's other students, Alexander Lowen and John Pierakos, created their own system for the diagnosis, classification, and treatment of psychological disorders or psychopathology. Their system, which they named *bioenergetics*, is thoroughly rooted in the Reichian tradition. At the core of bioenergetics is the view that the person is an energy system and that psychological disorders can be understood as problems of organismic energy regulation. Their model which defines these problems consists of three elements, namely *charge*, *ground*, and *discharge*. Charge refers the generation of energy. Ground means the ability to contain or tolerate the charge of energy. Lowen (1975) explained this as follows:

Bioenergetically speaking, grounding serves the same function for the organism's energy system that it does for a high-tension electrical circuit. It provides a safety valve for the discharge of excess excitation. In an electrical system the sudden buildup of charge could burn out a part or cause fire. In the human personality the buildup of charge could also be dangerous if the person were not grounded. The individual could split off, become hysterical, experience anxiety or go into a slump ... the more a person can feel his contact with the ground, the more he can hold his ground, the more charge he can tolerate and the more feeling he can handle [p. 196].

It is this concept of grounding that sets bioenergetics apart from the theories of Reich and of his other followers. As Lowen (1975) declared, "the concept of grounding—a concept unique to bioenergetics" (p. 40).

Discharge, of course, is the release of the built-up charge of energy through muscular action. "The living organism can only function if there is a balance between energy charge and discharge. It maintains a level of energy consistent with its needs and opportunities" (Lowen, 1975, p. 48). Psychopathology, then, is defined in bioenergetics in terms of difficulty in producing an adequate charge of energy, inability to hold on to the energy until an appropriate and opportune moment for discharging it, or the leaving of a residual charge of energy because of a less than fully adequate discharge. Thus, Lowen and Pierakos revised Reich's four-step model discussed above, using the following as their working model:

Charge → Ground → Discharge

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Another significant theorist in the tradition of Reich is Stanley Keleman. One aspect of energy dynamics on which he focused was whether the person is in a state of being less than adequately charged with energy or a state of having too great a charge. He termed these *undercharged* and *overcharged*, respectively (Smith, 1985). These can be placed, then, on a continuum as follows:

Undercharged ← ----- → Overcharged

Each individual can be evaluated in terms of placement along this energy continuum. This placement may reflect the context of the moment or a more chronic and habitual context. The obvious implication is that the more central one's placement on this continuum, the more optimal is one's overall functioning.

Before departing from these post-Reichian schools and the centrality of energy in their nuanced theories, brief mention of Gestalt therapy is in order. Although several pioneers of this approach may deserve mention, Frederick "Fritz" Perls is indisputably its doyen and most recognized figure. Even though he studied with Reich, and therefore was identified with psychoanalysis in its broadest sense, he developed a theory and style of practice that was unique among his peers and with respect to his mentor. The subtitle of the book that many of his followers have long considered his most basic and complete bespeaks of the importance of energy in his theory. Titled simply *Gestalt Therapy*, the subtitle is *Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* (Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, 1951).

Whereas other theorists descended of Reich spoke of energy, Perls tended to prefer the term *excitement*, something that is more directly observable than the energy that underlies it.

We use the term excitement to cover the heightened energy mobilization which occurs whenever there is strong concern and strong contact, whether erotic, aggressive, creative or whatever. In excitement there is always an upsurge in the metabolic process of oxidizing stored food-substances—and hence an imperious need for more air! The healthy organism responds in simple fashion by increasing the rate and amplitude of breathing [Perls, et al., 1951, p. 128].

These authors, with italics for emphasis, stated that "*anxiety is the experience of breathing difficulty during any blocked excitement*" (p. 128). Continuing into the realm of neurosis, they added the following:

The neurotic, on the other hand, invariably attempts to control excitement—and his chief method is to interfere with his breathing. He attempts to create the illusion for

### 3. *The Lower World*

himself and others of being unmoved, of remaining “calm and collected,” self-controlled. [Anxiety] is, thus, not in itself a symptom of the neurosis, but it occurs in neurosis as an emergency measure produced by the conflict between strong excitement and fearful self-control [p. 128].

What is feared, of course, is the expression of unacceptable erotic and aggressive urges.

The therapeutic styles of Gestalt therapists and bioenergetics therapists are quite distinct; the integration of the two styles has, however, been undertaken by a number of practitioners. This is in part possible because of a degree of theoretical compatibility. For instance, although Perls did not suggest any such formulaic model, I offer the following analogy as a theoretical bridge between bioenergetics and Gestalt therapy.

Excitement → Self-support → Expression : Gestalt : :

Charge → Grounding → Discharge : Bioenergetics

That is to say, the terms Excitement and Charge are analogous in the two psychotherapy systems, as are Self-support and Grounding, and as are Expression and Discharge. A difference between the two systems is at the same time revealed in the subtlety of these respective idioms, just as in the case of excitement as opposed to energy. Additionally, Gestalt therapy is grounded in a more existential and humanistic philosophy, and less likely to apply its theory as mechanically as is sometimes true of bioenergetics.

Regardless of which terminology we pick, the relevance of energy to personality is compellingly proclaimed. Call it libido (or *mortido*), psychic energy or *orgone*, energy or excitement. At one extreme we have melancholic temperament, the inhibitory type, and the undercharge. Choleric temperament, the excitatory type, and overcharge anchor the other extreme. Between the extremes stand the phlegmatic temperament or quiet type and the sanguine temperament or lively type. This is the zone of the central, equilibrated, or healthy types. The metaphors of cooling off and heating up come easily to mind. And herein the entropy of Niflheim, the fires of Muspell, and their meeting in Ginnungagap gain obvious relevance as metaphors of consciousness, a map of the mind. Assuming a metaphorical attitude, one may think of human behavior as being dominated by the fires of Muspell, the cold and ice of Niflheim, or falling somewhere betwixt the two in dynamic balance as in their creative meeting in

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Ginnungagap. This metaphor may be applied either to a given behavior in the moment, or to the general personality style of a person over time.

### *Hel*

Let us turn, now, to the third realm of the underworld. If Surt is the personification of Muspell, Hel may be the same for her realm. Clearly, Hel dwells beneath the earth, in the netherworld. Her realm, however, may be Niflheim, also known as Niflhel or *Dark Hel*. But this *Goddess of Death* may rule over a realm, itself, with the eponymous name Hel.

Should one wish to seek Hel, a choice that would not bode well for even a god, one would take *Helveg* (Hel road). As for directions, “the road to Hel lies downwards and northwards” (Sturluson, 1954, p. 83). From either the upper world or the middle world this means, of course, a descent to the lower world. Northwards would, of course, represent the direction towards cold and ice, quite literally for the pre-Viking and Viking-age peoples who embraced the Norse religion.

Hel is the ruler of the world of the dead. This role can be recognized as an archetypal one; many and diverse cultures include within their mythology a figure that lords over the dead in the underworld. The role may tend more toward that of judge, of guide or psychopomp, or of keeper of the realm. In ancient Babylonia, it is *Ereshkigal*, the evil sister of *Ishtar*. In the myth of Mare in the Underworld which is found in Kenya, Mare’s kindly guide is known only as “an old woman.” In ancient India, it was believed that *Yama*, led the dead to the Underworld. Although usually depicted as heartless and cruel, Yama could be compassionate as evidenced by his taking of the souls of very sick people in order to free them from their suffering. It is *Hina*, the first woman, who rules *Po*, the land of night where the dead dwell, in the beliefs of ancient New Zealanders. By the Iroquois, *Tarenyawagon* (known as Hiawatha when living on earth) was believed to be a compassionate master of ceremonies for spirits of the dead as they danced in the spirit world. For the Algonquins, it was an old man who gave directions to the spirit world, far to the south. *Osiris* was ancient Egypt’s god of the dead. It is in his hall that forty-two assessors initially consider the evidence for the life of the soul of the departed; ultimate judgement is in the hands of three judges, the gods *Horus*, *Anubis*, and *Thoth*. Judgement is to be impartial (Bierlein, 1994).



### 3. *The Lower World*

A most elaborate mythological journey to the Underworld was proposed by the Greeks and Romans. At death, the soul leaves the body and travels to the Underworld, with the god *Hermes* as its guide. At the banks of the *River Styx* (Hateful), the ferryman *Charon* requires payment in order to take the soul across the river. Without the proper fare, the soul may wonder for a hundred years. A three-headed dog, *Cerberus*, guards the gate to the Underworld. Once in the Underworld, the soul meets three judges, *Rhadamanthus*, *Aeacus*, and *Minos*, set to judge Europeans, Asiatics, and the hardest cases, respectively. According to judgment, the soul is then directed leftward to *Hades* for punishment, or right to the *Elysian Fields* where one is rewarded with perpetual bliss. And from the Elysian Fields, a soul may be reincarnated and return to earth for as many as three times. This requires, however, a drink from the water of *Lethe* (Forgetfulness). It is Hades who is lord of the Underworld, with his eponymous realm of Hades (Bierlein, 1994).

Hel is, then, the Norse inflection of this archetype, the ruler of the dead. As for Hel's abode, her hall is called "damp-with-sleet," her plate "hunger," her knife "famine," her servant and maid-servant "slow-moving," the stone at her entrance "drop-to-destruction," her bed "sick-bed," its hangings "glimmering misfortune" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 56).

As we look beyond this archetypal form per se, we can focus on the imagined material manifestation that constitutes Hel. That is, we can limn Hel as the specifically Norse representative of the warder of the dead in the *mundus archetypes* or world of archetypes. First, we would do well to note that she is female. In order to appreciate the import of this, let us look to the denizens of the realms in which the three great roots of Yggdrasil are terminated. There are definitely roots in Jötunheim and in the nether world of either Hel or Niflheim. As we have seen, the third may be in either Midgaard or Asgaard. So, let us consider all four of these worlds. Whereas Asgaard is populated by goddesses and gods, and Jötunheim is populated by giantesses and giants, and Midgaard is populated by women and men, Hel holds exclusive female rule in her realm. In and of itself, ruling alone over her realm surely bespeaks great power, but we are left only to wonder how that power may be fashioned by her gender.

Interestingly, "Hel is half black, half flesh-colour, and is easily recognized from this" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 56). "Black" most likely refers to the dark, bluish-gray lividity of a corpse. In addition, her partial negritude can be taken as a symbol of her dark nature and the tenebrous atmosphere



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of her realm. Hel displays a countenance that is congruent with this atmosphere, rather grim and gloomy.

With the location of Hel's realm made clear, and concomitantly her formal (archetypal) and material natures established, to the extent that the ancient literature allows, we can turn now to a closer examination of how she came into being. This look into her provenance will no doubt contribute further to the defining of her nature. She is the daughter of Loki, the Trickster god. We are told that through his mating with the giantess *Angrboda*, Loki sired three monsters, namely the *Midgard Serpent*, the *Fenrir wolf*, and Hel. Loki was himself born of a father who was a giant and a mother who was an Aesir goddess, so even though Loki is counted among the Aesir gods, he is actually half god and half giant. Hence, Hel, by virtue of coming out of a giantess by a half-giant half-god, is strongly of giant lineage.

Foreseeing the serious trouble that Loki's three monstrous children would foment, Odin in his position as chief god had them brought to him in order that he could assign them to places that would keep the cosmos safe from them. "He threw Hel into Niflheim and gave her authority over nine worlds, on the condition that she shared all her provisions with those who were sent to her, namely men who die from disease or old age" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 56). The question of which humans are sent to Hel is raised in another passage of the *Prose Edda* with the following words: "Wicked men will go to Hel and thence to Niflhel that is down in the ninth world" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 31). It appears that wicked men and those who die of disease or old age may suffer the same fate. But, is this an alteration of the older Norse mythology owing to the coming of Christianity to Iceland and its influence after 1000 CE? "Wicked men" has the ring of a Christian hell. In discussing this, R.I. Page (1995) opined in his scholarly *Chronicles of the Vikings*, "There are places of punishment for the evil—more a Christian than a pagan concept, I suspect" (p. 208). Such a view is consistent with Grimm's (1966) statement that "gloomy and joyless as we must imagine Niflheimr (*sic*), there is no mention anywhere of its denizens being punished and tormented" (p. 804). By way of clarification of what otherwise may seem contradictory, Grimm added that although it was later said that Hel received "the bad, the criminal," "the former Hel, as a contrast to Valhöll, used to harbor all the residue of men who had not fallen in fight, without its being implied that they were sinners deserving punishment" (p. 824).

### 3. The Lower World

Already, in identifying Hel as the keeper of a realm of the dead, we have segued into a discussion of her purpose, her reason for existing. On the surface, the answer seems obvious enough. To wit, Hel's purpose is to rule over the realm of the dead. Nota bene: it is specifically those who have died of disease or old age, or perhaps the wicked that she receives. We are told, that the *Valkyries*, Choosers of the Slain, ride above the battlefield marking with their spears those who are to fall, then conduct the battle-slain to Odin's abode, Valhalla, Hall of the Slain. Valhalla is the hall of dead heroes and is located in Asgaard in the upper world. It is a place of manifold as well as perpetual pleasure. Freyja, the goddess who leads the Vanir or fertility gods and goddesses, however, shares the dead from the battlefield with Odin. She claims half of the dead heroes to be with her in Vanaheim in the upper world. In addition, *Geffjon*, the Virgin Goddess, gathers to her hall in Asgaard all girls who die unwedded. Maidens who die virgins wait upon her, we are told (Grimm, 2012). Finally, those who are drowned at sea are drawn into the net of *Ran* and carried off by her. This ability to claim her share of the dead attests to her divinity. Thus, we see that heroes and virgins find abode in the upper world, having been chosen by Odin or Freyja or by Gefjon, respectively, or by Ran if drowned at sea. It is those whose virtue does not distinguish them that are thereby relegated to Hel in the underworld. By wicked behavior or by default of sickness or old age, these are sent to Hel.

Snorri further expanded his cosmography of the dead, but although the idea of multiple worlds for the dead predates contact with Christianity, the following shows clear Christian influence:

I know where stands a hall  
brighter than sunlight  
better than gold  
in Lee-of-flame, Gimlé;  
hosts of the righteous  
shall it inherit,  
live in delight  
everlastingly  
[Sturluson, 1954, p. 47].

Snorri elaborates, if not befogs this cosmography by the presence of a hall called *Brimir* "which serves good drink to the dead lucky enough to arrive there" and "in the hall Sindri in the Nidafjöll Mountains, good and righteous men will find quarter" (DuBois, 1999, p. 80).

In addition, Snorri provides places of torture. In his words:

## The Echo of Odin

I know a hall  
whose doors face north  
on Nástrand  
far from the sun,  
poison drips  
from lights in the roof;  
that building is woven  
of backs of snakes.  
There heavy streams  
must be waded through  
by breakers of pledges  
and murderers.  
But it is worst [of all] in Hvergelmir.  
There Nidhogg bedevils  
the bodies of the dead  
[Sturluson, 1954, p. 91].

Thus, we see further realms of eternal bliss for the righteous and places of eternal torture for the wicked, themes most compatible with the teachings of the Christian missionaries. Interestingly, it is murder and the breaking of pledges that are the specified sins. The first is not surprising, but the latter is clear reflection of the value placed on keeping one's oath in Viking society.

In spite of Snorri's suggestion of further realms where the dead may go, let us not be distracted from the more significant roles played by Odin, Freyja, Gefjon, Ran, and Hel as overlords of their respective realms and keepers of the dead. More of the gods and goddesses, later.

On the mythopoetic level, Hel is an ogress, mostly giantess, but with a bit of goddess in her. Her glum nature is symbolically reflected in her partial blackness. With grim countenance she receives the dead who are not distinguished by heroism or virginity (nor who have drowned) into her chthonic world. Here gloom and coldness, destruction and dampness prevail. As mandated by Odin, she shares her provisions, such as they are, hunger and famine.

On the metaphorical level, Hel is perhaps most meaningfully seen as necessary for the maintenance of balance. Within the underworld, we can recognize this balance through the antipodal relationship of Niflheim and Muspell. As already noted, Niflheim, over which Hel rules, can be seen to symbolize entropy—coldness, darkness, quiet, and stillness. This provides balance for the dynamism of Muspell with its heat, light, sound, and movement.

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In addition to the energetic balance within the underworld, there is balance between the underworld and the upper world through the respective realms of Hel on the one hand and Asgaard on the other. Otherwise stated, Hel is mostly giantess and Odin, Freyja, Gefjon, and Ran are a god and goddesses. The overarching dynamic throughout Norse mythology is the battle of the gods and goddesses versus the giants. The Aesir or warrior race of gods and goddesses and the Vanir race of fertility gods and goddesses were set in opposition to the chaos and destruction instinctively meted out by the giants until the end of the cosmos on the day of *Ragnarök*. Therefore, from a cosmic perspective, the destructiveness caused by the giants, and its ineluctable chaos, must be respected, for it is through destruction that the old passes away in order to make room for the arising of the new.

The natural cycles of *arising*, *being*, and *passing away* are acknowledged and highly honored in Norse mythology. Hel can be considered in terms of her role in such natural cycles. She is identified as the active agent of Niflheim, the primal realm that through opposition with Muspell led to the arising of the cosmos. In the ongoing being of the cosmos, Niflheim with its cold, darkness, quietness, and stillness tempers the flames of Muspell, keeping an energetic balance. As for passing away, as dead heroes, virgins, and those drowned at sea are taken to the upper world to be with Odin, Freyja, Gefjon, or Ran, Hel claims the wicked or those who died from sickness or old age to take to her hall in the underworld realm of Niflheim. Thus, we see that Hel is a prime figure in the balance of two cosmic dimensions: an energetic dimension of dynamism and entropy; and an eschatological dimension, if you will, wherein virtue or absence thereof is noted and fate fulfilled. The mythology surrounding Hel is rich in detail and in metaphor, and in the final analysis the purpose may be to inform us of the necessity for balance not only in or between the netherworld and the upper world, but in our middle world as well.

What, then, does this lowest realm of the empyrean trilogy, itself, represent? It calls attention to the archetype of dynamic balance, as we have seen. Muspell and Niflheim. Hel and Asgaard. Lower world and upper world. Life vivified by the balanced energy of the Muspell-Niflheim dynamism and death with and in Hel. Surely, it is, too, a metaphor for lower consciousness. The fires of Muspell in opposition to the cold darkness of Niflheim depict a dimension of energy, but energy without content, ergo but a primitive level of consciousness, a proto-consciousness really.

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Energy can be experienced, but in and of itself it does not involve thought, feeling, or action; it enters awareness as only excitement, or lack thereof. One can think about it, have feelings about it, take action from it, as we have seen. But these are higher functions to be found in realms above.

We can relate this at best marginal consciousness to the work of Paul D. MacLean. Building on the work of James W. Papez, he identified what he believed to be three distinct evolutionary stages in the development of the human brain, the *reptilian brain*, the *old mammalian brain*, and the *new mammalian brain* (Hampden-Turner, 1981). In his model, which MacLean termed the *triune brain*, MacLean emphasized the conservation of more primitive evolutionary structures within the modern human brain. That is, “the human brain [is] a three-part phylogenetic system reflecting our evolutionary connection to both reptiles and lower mammals. Think of it as a brain within a brain within brain. Each successive layer is devoted to increasingly complex functions and abilities” (Cozolino, 2002, p. 8). The reptilian brain consists of “the basal ganglia as the highest organizational level (above the brain stem and spinal cord...). The basal ganglia mediates instinctive behaviors such as fight-or-flight responses, hunger, defending territory, and sexual pursuit” (Amthor, 2012, p. 211). Or, in other words, it is “responsible for activation, arousal, homeostasis of the organism, and reproductive drives” (Cozolino, 2002, p. 8). These lower functions of the human reptilian brain—activation, arousal, homeostasis—fit comfortably into the metaphor of the dynamic balance of the fire of Muspell and the ice of Niflheim. So too, the Freudian instincts of sex and aggression, expressed in the above quotes with the words, “sexual pursuit” and “reproductive drives” on the one hand, “fight-or-flight” and “defending territory” on the other.

Put simply, the lower world of Norse cosmography is revealed as an apt metaphor for the reptilian brain, and in turn for the unconscious or the proto-conscious awareness of the dynamic of energy in the service of sexual and aggressive instincts. And, embedded in this is a multi-layered metaphor of balance. With these metaphors, Norse mythology has given us a fascinating map of the mind.

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### The Middle World

#### *Midgaard, Svartalfheim and Jötunheim*

If the underworld is cosmographically one of fire and ice and home for some of the dead, as a map of the mind, as we have seen, it speaks metaphorically of instinctual energy and a lower reptilian-like consciousness. With the underworld and its three realms limned as such, we can ascend to the middle world of the empyrean trilogy and explore the three realms found there. Here we will find a triumvirate of sentient beings who reflect an array of levels or types of consciousness.

#### *Midgaard*

In Norse cosmogenesis, Midgaard was created by Odin, Vili, and Vé from Ymir's eyebrows, as we have seen. This home of humankind is given a very central position. Midgaard is not only located on the central plane of the empyrean trilogy, but it may be seen as the center point of the axis of Asgaard above and Hel below. As noted earlier, in the account of *The Poetry Edda* (Hollander, 1962), one of the three roots of Yggdrasil is found in Midgaard. This placement of Midgaard in the center of the Norse universe could easily be symbolically interpreted as a reflection of the importance granted humankind.

The centrality of humankind is underscored by the fact that Jörmungand is known also as the *Midgaard Serpent*. Recall that through his mating with the giantess Angrboda, Loki fathered three monstrous children, namely the wolf Fenrir, Hel, and Jörmungand. Since Loki was born of a father who was a giant and a mother who was an Aesir goddess, even

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though Loki is counted among the Aesir gods, he is actually half god and half giant. His half-giant lineage, in addition to the fact that his children were brought up in Jötunheim among the giants, forebodes the peril that his children will bring at the time of Ragnarök. Foreseeing this danger through prophesy, Odin sent some gods to capture them and bring them to him. He then sent the monsters to places that would keep the cosmos safe from them. Jörmungand he threw into the “deep sea that surrounds the whole world, and it grew so large that it now lies in the middle of the ocean round the earth, biting its own tail” (Sturluson, 1954, p. 56). In her translation of *The Poetic Edda*, Carolyne Larrington (1996) referred to Jörmungand as “Earth-girdler” and “serpent” (p. 11). Lee Hollander (1962), on the other hand, chose the terms “earth girdling Serpent” and “Worm” in his translation (p. 11). We can understand both the first syllable of Jörmungand (Jörm-) and Hollander’s “Worm” through reference to the Old Norse language. In Old Norse, *ormr* is a word for snake, serpent, or worm (Byock, 2013). Not surprisingly, then, the word *orm* is found likewise in modern Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish.

We can recognize Jörmungand as an example of an archetypal symbol known as the *uroboros* dating at least from the second century CE. The uroboros (ouroboros) symbol “appears principally among the Gnostics and is depicted as a dragon, snake or serpent biting its own tail. In the broadest sense, it is a symbolic of time and the continuity of life” (Cirlot, 1962, p. 235). Expressing a more aesthetic and detailed perspective, Anthony Stevens (1999) commented that “the idea of self-sufficiency, self-containment, and self-completion is beautifully expressed by the primordial dragon or serpent with its tail in its mouth, the self-nourishing, self-begetting uroboros” (p. 197). He continued, noting that there has been an impressive number of examples of the uroboros, including a Babylonian world map, a Mesopotamian bowl, a Mexican calendar stone, a representation of Maya (the Hindu “eternal spinner”) encircled by a serpent, Navajo sand paintings, and gypsy amulets. To these we may add Jörmungand as the Norse inflection of the archetype.

With the central location of Midgaard established within the Norse cosmography, we can turn to the question of the sentient beings who dwell therein. To reiterate from earlier, as Odin, Vili, and Vé walked the seashore, they found two trees, one an ash-tree and the other probably an elm. They picked them up and created humans from these trees.

#### 4. *The Middle World*

The first gave them spirit and life; the second, understanding and power of movement; the third, form, speech, hearing and sight. They gave them clothes and names. The man was Ask and the woman Embla, and from them have sprung the races of men who were given Midgard to live in [Sturluson, 1954, p. 37].

This myth seems replete with potential symbolism. First, humans were created from trees, not created from inorganic matter, but from something itself living. So humankind, from its inception, is linked with an older life form. And it is appropriate that humans, like the trees, defy gravity as they rise vertically to an upright posture. But it was not one tree, rather two different kinds. This suggests a fundamental difference between the genders within the wider context of their common ancestral life form. Beyond spirit and life, itself, Snorri wrote that Odin and his brothers conferred motility, understanding, form, speech, hearing and sight, clothes, and names. These capacities seem in toto to set humans apart from their tree pro-genitors. Clothing could serve as a clue as to rank in society, while with names, both family ancestry and individual identity may be revealed.

With regard to societal rank, we can turn again to the mythological text. Taking “The Lay of Ríg,” which is part of *The Poetic Edda* (Hollander, 1962) as the source, we further find an account of the respective provenances of the thrall, the freeman, and the noble.



To begin, one of the gods whose name was *Heimdall* was traveling along the shore in Midgaard when he came upon a farm. Calling himself *Ríg*, he entered the house and found there a husband and wife sitting by a crude hearth built on the ground. Their names were *Ái* and *Edda*, Grandfather and Grandmother. They set *Ríg* down between them on a bench at the table and served him thick, heavy, hard baked bran bread and broth of boiled calf-meat. Having eaten, and ready for sleep, he took his place between Grandfather and Grandmother in their bed. In this manner, he stayed with them for three days, as was the customary stay for a guest, then traveled on his way. As the skald expressed it, “Moons full nine went meanwhile by. Gave Edda birth to a boy child then” (Hollander, 1962, p. 121). The child was swarthy skinned, with dark hair and dull eyes. His hands were scraggy and wrinkled with gnarled knuckles and “nasty” nails. He had thick fingers and an ugly face, a hulky back and his heels were



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long. Ái and Edda called him *Thrall*. When he had grown, a “crook-legged wench” with dirty feet and sunburned arms, and a nose that bent downward, came to visit. Her name was *Thír* (Drudge). They sat together and whispered and laughed, then lay together. In time they had a brood. Some of the sons were called Howler, Bastard, Sluggard, Stinker, Stableboy (*sic*), Lout, and Swarthy. They laid fences, saw to the swine, herded the goats, put dung on the fields, and such. The daughters were called names such as Slattern, Cinder-Wench, Stout-Leg, Serving Maid, Stumpy and Dumpy. Thus arose the breed of thralls. In modern Norwegian, the word is *trell*, in English, slave.

Continuing his journey, Ríg came upon another dwelling, with its door ajar. Inside, he found a husband and wife doing their work around a fire set on the floor. The husband, *Afi*, worked in wood while his wife, *Amma*, braided yarn for weaving. His beard was brushed and she wore a smock on her breast, a kerchief on her neck and clasps on her shoulders. Ríg sat down between them at the table and Amma served him the best of boiled calf-meat that she had. Ríg slept between Afi and Amma for three nights, then departed. Nine months later, Amma gave birth to a boy, *Karl*. They clothed him in linen. He was ruddy and “rapid his eyes” (Hollander, 1962, p. 123). In time, a bride named *Snær*, was brought to him. Their sons were called Yoeman, Master, Farmer, Crofter, Swain, Smith and such. Their daughters, Gentlewoman, Bride, Lady, Maiden, Dame and so on. Thus, the kin of karls, or free men of the common people. Karl is the Old Norse word for man or old man, and is still in use in Icelandic and in Swedish.

For a third time, Ríg set forth, and for a third time he came upon a dwelling, this time a hall with southward door, a good omen. The door was raised, a sign of hospitality in the home of a noble. So Ríg strode in, finding straw on the floor and two good folk called Father and Mother. Father was twining a bowstring while Mother stroked the linen and straightened her sleeves. She was white of neck, had a brooch on her breast, a sark, and a long train of silk. This time Ríg sat down at a table covered by a broidered cloth of bleached flax. Mother brought forth a light-baked loaf of thin, white bread made of wheat. With this were cured bacon and steaked fowl placed upon a silver plate. From gold-plated cups they drank wine and chatted until time to sleep. He slept there between Father and Mother for three

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nights, then he traveled on. After nine months, Mother bore a son whom they swathed in silk and named *Earl*. “Was his hair flaxen and fair-hued his cheek, his eyes awfully like an adder’s blazed” (Hollander, 1962, p. 125). Such eyes were regarded as a sign of noble birth. Earl grew to be a great warrior, skilled with bow, spear, and sword. And so he won land and shared his wealth, generosity being a high virtue. Earl married *Erna*, a fair-haired and wise daughter of a nobleman. Their sons were Boy, Bairn, Issue, Child, Heir, Youth, Squire, Offspring, Lad, Son, Scion, *Kund*, and *Kon*. The poem changes direction at this point. But before leaving the poem, note that the last two sons’ names mean *noble descendant* and the final one is related to *konungr*, Old Norse for king. In modern Danish and Norwegian, it is *konge*, in Swedish, *kung*, and in Icelandic it is *konungur*. As for Earl, the Old Norse word is *jarl*, as is true in modern Norwegian.



The “Lay of Ríg” offers us insight into the structure of human society as created by Heimdall. He visited three houses, in turn, and observed how life was in each, “dull and peasant-like, skilled and practical, noble and courtly respectively” (Larrington, 1996, p. 246). In each case, he accepted their hospitality, including the sharing of their bed. As result, each of the women gave birth to a son sired by Ríg. “These are the progenitors of each class, each marrying a suitable wife and producing a bevy of children with symbolic names to continue the line” (p. 246).

Humankind is graced with a spark of divinity. As important a god as Heimdall, himself, claimed a grandfatherly position in the decent of humans. From Heimdall, to thrall, karl, or jarl, and to their children, and thence their progeny on down through the line, humans carry the blood of the gods. Humankind’s place of dwelling within the Norse cosmography and its origins surely bespeak both centrality, and importance. Nevertheless, save through death, humans must remain not only on the central empyrean plane, but in the world of Midgaard. Their lot is not to travel to other worlds in their lifetime.

#### *Svartalfheim*

Even though, as indicated above, Karl and Snœr gave birth to Smith, and he in turn married and continued his line, humans are not the only

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smiths. In fact, greater skill in working in metals is possessed by the dark elves or *svartálfr*. Known also as dwarfs or *dvergar*, this is the race who live in Svartalfheim. And, their skill in metalwork is all the more remarkable in that they are able to produce magical implements and unsurpassed adornments. Let us explore this astounding and unique prowess before looking into the character of the dark elves as such. Perhaps in so doing, their personality features will begin slowly to come to light.

Several myths reveal the unmatched skill of the dark elves. To begin, Snorri (Sturluson, 1954) relates as follows.



As a prank, Loki cut off all the hair of Thor's wife Sif. While such japery was, of course, Loki's wont, when Thor was infuriated, his wont was to smash heads and break bones. But Loki propitiated Thor by swearing that he would persuade the dark elves to make hair of gold for Sif, hair that would not only be beautiful, but that would grow like natural hair. Loki sought out the dark elves called the sons of Ivaldi, and they made not only the hair, but a ship named *Skidbladnir* and a spear named *Gungnir* for Odin. True to form, Loki did not leave well enough alone, but proceeded to wager his head with a dark elf named *Brokk* that his brother *Eitri* could not match this feat with three more treasures just as fine. The dark elves accepted the challenge and heated the furnace at the smithy.

First, Eitri instructed Brokk to work the bellows without ceasing until he completed his art and removed it from the forge. As Brokk worked the bellows, a fly landed on his hand and stung him. Nonetheless he continued without pause until Eitri removed a boar with bristles of gold. Next, Eitri put gold in the furnace and crafted a ring called *Draupnir*. Throughout the fashioning of the ring, Brokk worked the bellows, never halting, in spite of being stung on the neck twice as badly as before. Finally, Eitri put iron in the furnace, enjoining Brokk to be steadfast and not allow the bellows even to pause, for fear of spoiling the product. But this time, the fly landed between Brokk's eyes and stung him so severely that blood ran into his eyes and he could not see. He stopped the bellows and brushed the fly away as quickly as he could. Everything in the furnace was but moments from being ruined. Eitri took from the furnace a hammer.

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Giving these additional three treasures to Brokk, he told his brother to take them to Asgaard in order to settle the wager.

Odin, Thor, and Frey sat in judgement. Loki gave Gungnir to Odin, explaining that this spear never missed its mark. To Thor he gave the hair that was to be Sif's. It would grow to her skin when she put it on, Loki explained. Thor was appeased, and so splendid was the hair made for Sif that *Sif's hair* became a kenning for gold, itself. A breeze would arise to take it where it had to go whenever Skidbladnir's sail was raised. Yet, Frey could fold it together like a cloth and put it into his pouch. With these three treasures having been delivered by Loki, Brokk presented his three. He gave Odin the golden ring and explained that every ninth night eight others would drop from it, each one as heavy as Draupnir itself. To Frey he gave the boar with bristles of gold, claiming that it could run through the air, it could run over the sea, and was faster than a horse. Wherever it traveled, in gloom or darkness, it would be in brilliant light, for its bristles shone so. Finally, he gave the hammer to Thor. This hammer would never break, regardless of how hard it hit and no matter what it struck. Even more remarkable, Thor would never lose it, for no matter how far he flung it, it would unfailingly return. If Thor desired, it would become so small that he could put it in his shirt. It did have one imperfection, however; its handle was rather short.

The gods decided that Thor's hammer was the best of the treasures, for it was the most effective weapon against the giants. The dark elf had won the wager. Loki tried in vain to save his head, but Brokk was adamant. Thereupon, Loki ran off. In spite of the fact that he was wearing shoes that enabled him to run through the air and over the sea, upon the dark elf's request, Thor captured Loki. In fulfillment of their wager, Brokk wanted to cut off Loki's head. But, being the trickster that he was, Loki quickly explained that although Brokk had legitimate claim to his head, he had no such claim to his neck! So, Brokk settled for sewing Loki's mouth shut, first by drilling holes through Loki's lips with an awl and then pulling a thong through the holes. That thong is known as *Vartari*.



Certainly, much is learned about Loki in this myth. Clever and glib, mischievous and more than a little dangerous. A shapeshifter (the fly).

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We will examine his behavior and his character more fully when we reach Asgaard in our exploration of Norse cosmography-cum-cartography of consciousness. Let us focus now on what this myth reveals about the dark elves.

Even though Loki was in trouble as result of his prankishness, the sons of Ivaldi, Brokk and Eitri, seemed not to hesitate in helping him to escape the wrath of Thor. They set about to create magical, golden hair which would save Loki. That is, they were not disinclined to insinuate themselves into a deadly conflict between two gods, or more precisely, a god and a half-god. Lest we credit these dark elves with being motivated by a wish to keep peace between Loki and Thor, let alone with altruism, we need only to consider their later wager with Loki. Although it was Loki, himself, who proposed the wager, the dark elves did not hesitate to accept it. Why such a wager? The ensuing activity gave Loki the opportunity, through his ability to shapeshift, to trick the dark elves, thereby manifesting his essence as trickster. This is simply the sort of thing that tricksters do. But for their part, the dark elves showed that they felt no loyalty to Loki, let alone any concern for him. In addition, when a silver-tongued Loki saved himself from decollation, Brokk visited upon him a surely painful and embarrassing ordeal by stitching shut his lips. Whereas a death meted out in accordance with a lost wager may have been noble, having one's lips sewn shut could only lead to loss of face, in both senses. Perhaps more about dark elves than their astounding skill as smiths is revealed already.

As for their skill at the forge, they produced not only Sif's golden hair, but Odin's spear, Gungnir; and Frey's ship, Skidbladnir, all infused with magic. If that was not enough to establish their marvelous abilities, Eitri further crafted three more magical gifts, Gullinborsti, known also as *Slídrugtanni*, Frey's golden bristled boar; Draupnir, Odin's golden ring; and *Mjöllnir*, Thor's hammer. That is, the dark elves crafted two objects for each of the three major gods, one of gold and one of iron or wood. The race of dark elves, as represented by Brokk and Eitri, are established, then, as magical artisans. They specialize in jewelry and weapons for the gods. Goldsmiths and blacksmiths extraordinaire.

It is certainly no surprise that after Fenrir broke out of two previous fetters, Odin sent Frey's servant, *Skirnir*, down to Svartalfheim to engage the dark elves to make a fetter that would hold the wolf. The dark elves accommodated and demonstrated a creative versatility by creating *Gleipnir*,

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a restraint made of “cat noise, woman beard, mountain roots, bear sinews, fish breath, and bird spittle” (Lindow, 2001, p. 145). Who but the dark elves could concoct such a rare amalgam?

And as is embodied in the above myths, the flow of the objects is always from the dark elves to the gods, not ever the other way around. In addition to these various and remarkable objects, perhaps they supported the gods even with gifts of magic, itself. In the “Hávamál” of *The Poetic Edda* (Hollander, 1962), we learn that Odin learned a magical spell sung by the dark elf *Thjódrörir*, which “gave to Æsir strength, to alfs victory by his song and insight to Óðin” (p. 40). Interestingly, Lindow (2001) translated this passage as “Wealth for the æsir, and prosperity for the elves, mind for Hroptatyr [Odin]” (p. 101). The point, however, is that the dark elves could bestow the gift of magic as well as gifts of weapons and jewelry. But, if admirable their skills, then their lack of showing either compassion or loyalty is another matter entirely. Even a god would be ill advised to trust in their gentle mercies.

Gentle mercies, indeed. Then consider the word gentle, itself; because of the softness of their bodies, one of the less common meanings of the word gentle is *maggot*. An irony may be found, therefore, in the origin of the dark elves. “Snorri tells us in *Gylfaginning* that they originated as maggots in the flesh of the proto-giant Ymir, whose body the gods used to fashion the cosmos” (Lindow, 2001, p. 101). Although arising from gentles, the dark elves are anything but.

Leaving semantic irony aside, what more can be made of the provenance of the dark elves? To say that they are of low birth would be a gross understatement, and their ancestry surely evokes more than a hint of disgust. Living down in the earth, in holes and cracks in rocks, as well as in the mountains, seems congruent with this. However, at least some of the dark elves have a rather striking peculiarity that is further reason for living down in the earth: if exposed to the sun, they are turned to stone! That is, they are a lucifugous race, creatures who fear and eschew sunlight. With reference to a prominent member of their race, we are told by Lindow (2001) that the dark elves call the sun “Dvalin’s deluder” (p. 99), in Hollander’s (1962) translation, “Dvalin’s Doom” (p. 113).

In spite of low birth, however, as we saw earlier, the dark elves do fulfill an important cosmographical role. They hold up the sky, and at once represent the cardinal directions in the personified forms known as Nordi, Sudri, Austri, and Vestri. In this regard, they are the Norse symbols of an archetype.

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The dark elves evince lust for both gold and for beautiful women. The former is implied when Odin sent Loki to the dark elves to obtain gold for Otter's ransom, that is, to compensate Hreidmar for the "accidental" death of his son, Otter, at the hand of Loki. It was the dark elf Andvari who held a stash of gold sufficient to pay the ransom, which by fate became the gold of the elaborate myth that spawned both the Old Norse version, the *Saga of the Volsungs*, and its Middle High German version, *The Nibelungenlied* (wherein Andvari is named *Alberich*). Furthermore, as noted earlier, it is this gold and ring which was made from this same gold that appear prominently in Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung* and inspired Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Obviously, this was a large treasure trove, the product of hoarding and born of greed.

As for dark elves and women, mythic complexity manifests itself as usual. In simple form, Freyja, gorgeous Vanir goddess, obtained from the dark elves a gold torque or necklace with the name *Brísinga*. It was of incredible beauty and became on occasion the object of theft and of violent struggle for its possession. The four dark elves, *Alfrigg*, *Dvalin*, *Berling*, and *Grerr*, for their part, exacted from Freyja the price of sleeping with each of them in return for the possession of the necklace. And, so Freyja complied, gaining the necklace of the Brisings. Only Dvalin's name is heard again in the myths. However, the actions of these four went far to establish the reputation of the dark elves as lusting after beautiful women. Of Freyja, we will hear more, later.

In spite of the resemblance of the names, Svartalfheim and Alfheim are cosmographically far apart, being in the middle world and upper world respectively. So, as we might then expect, a dark elf (*svartalf*) shares little with an elf or light elf (*liósalf*). They are worlds apart in both senses of the phrase. In comparing the two races, alterity is the rule.

With his brother Wilhelm, Jacob Grimm is best remembered, of course, for his role in the late nineteenth century collection and preservation of fairy tales. However, he also studied world mythology, bringing to bear his considerable skill as a philologist. In volume two of his 1883, three volume publication, *Teutonic Mythology*, he presented a greatly detailed exposition on the dark elves (Grimm, 1966). (A fourth volume followed five years later.) Examination of his work will enhance considerably our understanding of this race.

Grimm (1966) began his account of the dark elves by emphasizing that they "form a separate community, one might say a kingdom of their



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own, and are only induced by accident or stress of circumstances to have dealings with men" (p. 439). Taking pains to distinguish, to use his words, the *svartálfar* from the *liosálfar*, or the dark elves from the light elves, Grimm also affirmed most strongly the identity of the *svartálfar* and the *dvergar* or dwarfs. He mentioned in a footnote that this distinction was extant even in his time, for "in Norway popular belief keeps *alfer* and *dverge* apart" (p. 444).

Turning to their appearance, Grimm (1966) noted that "all or most of the *dvergar* in the Edda are cunning *smiths*. This seems the simplest explanation of their *black sooty* appearance [all italics, his]" (p. 447). Beyond their sootiness, and therefore blackened appearance, "the dwarf adds to his repulsive hue an ill-shaped body, a humped back, and coarse clothing" (p. 449). For emphasis, we are bluntly informed, they are decidedly "ugly and misshapen" (p. 449). Interestingly, the dwarf is fully grown by the age of three years, a height that is at most that of a four-year-old child and sometimes much smaller, perhaps only the span of a thumb!

Grimm (1966) calculated their realm to be in the middle world since "their forges are placed in caves and mountains: *Svartálfaheimr* must therefore lie in a mountainous region, not in the abyss of [the underworld]" (p. 447). And, as he reminded us, the dark elves are mostly smiths. Furthermore, "their calls and cries resound in the hills, and when man speaks loud, the dwarf replies, as it were, from the mountain" (p. 452). Such reply refers, of course, to an echo or *dvergmál*, in Old Norse.

As for their character, Grimm (1966) declares tersely, "all dwarfs ... are *thievish* [italics, his]" (p. 465). And, he refers again to "the dwarf's cunning" (p. 518). Surely replete with meaning as well as with information, Grimm presents us with the following revelation: "The sly shy dwarf is conscious of his mental superiority" (p. 518). Sly, we already know. Shy, too, not the least because of their mortal need to avoid the light of the sun. Perhaps also deemed shy because they are rarely seen, and even if seen may scurry away. But, "mental superiority" may come as a surprise. As Grimm explains, "our sage ... dwarfs are equally credited with having the gift of *divination* [italics, his]. As such the dwarf Andvari appears in the Edda, and still more Alvis (all-wise); dwarf Eugel prophesies to Siegfried, so does Grípir in the Edda, whose father's name is Eylimi" (p. 471).

In "The Lay of Alvis," found in *The Poetic Edda* (Hollander, 1962), we learn that on his way home from Jötunheim, Thor came upon the dark



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elf, Alvis. Here is what ensued. It seems that in Thor's absence, Alvis had convinced the gods to relinquish to him Thor's daughter for marriage. Thor agreed to give him his daughter to wed, contingent upon Alvis' ability to answer a list of questions. These questions concern the names by which each of the races of men, Æsir, Vanir, giants, elves, and dwarfs refer to the earth, heaven and the moon, the sun, the clouds, the wind and calm, the sea, fire, the woods and night, seed and beer. Alvis, quick of wit, succeeded in doing so. Although this lay has given its translator's some difficulty, and a surprising conclusion leaves questions, we need not be distracted by these issues. The point here is the sharp wit of the dark elf. First of all, he was able to convince the gods in Thor's absence to give him Thor's daughter. Then, confronted by Thor, Alvis was able to answer all of the latter's questions.

Evidence of sharp wit in the dark elves Andvari, Eugel, Gripi, and Eylimi is embedded in several of the lays (short lyric or narrative poems meant to be sung) which are found in *The Poetic Edda*, as well as in places in Snorri's *Prose Edda*. These are at once both sources for and tell, in their own right, aspects of what has been called "the Great Story of the North" (Tolkien, 2009). They involve both the mythology and the heroic, epic poems concerning the story of the Volsungs and the Niflungs. The *Völsunga Saga* was written in the thirteenth century, probably in Iceland. The somewhat different Middle High German version, *Das Nibelungenlied*, was written sometime during the beginning of the thirteenth century. Wagner used these sources, as already indicated, in his creation of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, his *Ring Cycle*. The cover of *Saga of the Volsungs*, translated by Jesse L. Byock, (1990) summarizes with the subtitle "The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer," and adds "Source for Wagner's *Ring* and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*." Much of the content of this present paragraph has already been presented. This brief review is important, however, in order to contextualize the material to follow, in which the dark elves' wit is to be explored. It seems necessary that the myth be told, and the epic summarized at this point. Based on Snorri's (Sturluson, 1954) account, I offer my following summary.



Odin, Loki, and *Hoenir* were exploring one day when they followed a river to a waterfall. There they saw an otter eating a salmon. Loki hurled a stone at the otter, fatally striking it on the head. Often

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given to boasting, Loki proudly proclaimed his getting both an otter and a salmon with one stone. Taking Loki's double catch with them, they went on until they came to a farm. The farmer there was *Hreidmar*, and he had much skill in magic. The gods asked for lodging and showed Hreidmar their catch. The farmer, recognizing the otter, called forth his sons *Fafnir* and *Regin* and told them that their brother, *Otter*, had been killed, and who had done the deed. Thereupon, the father and sons attacked Odin, Loki, and Hoenir and bound them. The *Æsir* swore to pay whatever ransom was required for their lives. The otter was flayed and the father demanded that the skin must be completely filled as well as covered with gold. Odin sent Loki to Svartalfheim for help. Loki came upon Andvari, who was in a pool in his fish shape. Loki seized him and exacted all the gold the dark elf had as a ransom for Andvari's own life. But, Andvari held back a small gold ring. The dark elf begged to keep the ring, saying that by its means he could become wealthy once more. Loki demanded all, and Andvari yielded, but pronounced the curse: "The ring would destroy everyone who owned it." Loki replied, "that was all to the good, adding that the prophecy should be fulfilled, provided that he himself pronounced it in the ears of those about to take over the ring" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 111).

When Odin saw the ring, he paid the gold to Hreidmar, but held back the ring. Hreidmar stuffed the otter skin with gold, then set it on end. Odin then covered it in gold and asked Hreidmar if the skin was now completely hidden. Hreidmar examined the skin, and catching sight of one whisker, demanded that that, too, be covered. Odin took the ring from his finger and covered the whisker, declaring that now they had paid the otter's ransom. "Loki declared that what Andvari had said should hold good, that the ring and the gold would destroy whosoever owned them. That has been the case ever since. Now you know why gold is called otter's ransom or the forced payment of the *Æsir* or metal-of-strife" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 111).

Hreidmar accepted the gold as *weregild* or payment for the killing of his son, *Otter*. *Fafnir* and *Regin* asked to share in the gold, and when Hreidmar refused, the brothers killed their father. When *Regin* asked, then, to share, *Fafnir* threatened his brother with death and sent him away. *Fafnir* went up on the Gnita Heath and made a lair, and turning himself into a dragon, he lay down on his gold.

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Regin went far away and became a smith. He adopted for his son, *Sigurd*, son of *Sigmund* and grandson of *Volsung*. Regin forged the sword *Gram*. It was so strong that Sigurd was able to cleave Regin's anvil with it, and so sharp that it would cut in two a lock of wool carried by a current of water. Regin told Sigurd where Fafnir lay on the treasure and egged him on to seek the gold. Together, Regin and Sigurd traveled to the Gnita Heath, whereupon Sigurd dug pits in Fafnir's path to the water. Sigurd sat in one and waited until Fafnir came along. When Fafnir crawled over the pit, Sigurd plunged the sword *Gram* into him, killing him. Regin then revealed to Sigurd that he had killed Fafnir, Regin's brother. Regin offered terms on condition that Sigurd roast Fafnir's heart over a fire. While Sigurd did so, Regin drank of Fafnir's blood, then lay down to sleep. Sigurd, touching the roasting heart to see how tender it was, burned his finger with the juice that ran from it. He stuck his finger in his mouth, and when the blood from Fafnir's heart touched it, he understood the language of birds. The nearby nuthatches advised him that he would be wise to eat Fafnir's heart. Furthermore, they warned, Regin was planning to betray him. Thereupon, Sigurd went up to Regin and slew him. He rode his horse, *Grani*, to Fafnir's lair, took the treasure, and rode away. This is why "gold is called Fafnir's abode or lair, or the metal of Gnita Heath, or Grani's burden" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 113).

Sigurd came to a hall on a mountain, and entering, he came upon a sleeping woman wearing a helmet and coat of mail. She awoke as he cut the mail-coat from her. She identified herself as *Brynhild*, a Valkyrie. Sigurd rode on and encountered King *Gjúki*, his wife *Grímhild* and their children, *Gunnar*, *Högni*, *Gudrún*, and *Gudny*, and a stepson, *Gotthorm*. Sigurd stayed with them, and in due time he married *Gudrún*. Sigurd, *Gunnar*, and *Högni* became sworn brothers. These three went to ask *Atli Budlason* for his sister *Brynhild* to be *Gunnar*'s wife. She lived in a hall at *Hindafjall* where she was surrounded by a flame. She had taken a vow to marry the man who dared to ride through the flames to her. Sigurd and *Gjúki*'s sons (known as the *Gjúkungar* or *Niflungar*, that is, *Nibelungs*) rode to the mountain so that *Gunnar* could ride through the flames and win *Brynhild*. However, his horse, *Goti*, shied and would not cross the flames. Thereupon, Sigurd and *Gunnar* exchanged both shapes and names so that Sigurd could ride *Grani* through the flames in Gun-

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nar's stead. This was needed because Grani would carry no one but Sigurd. So, believed to be Gunnar, Sigurd married Brynhild. As they lay that night, Sigurd laid the sword, Gram, between them. In the morning Sigurd gave Brynhild the gold ring that Loki had taken from Andvari and received another from her. Taking their leave, Sigurd and Gunnar changed their shapes and names again, and returned to Gjúki with Brynhild. Sigurd and Gudrún had two children named *Sigmund* and *Svanhild*.

One day when Brynhild and Gudrún went to the river to wash their hair, they began to argue over whose husband was of higher status. Brynhild waded farther into the river saying she would not use the water in which Gudrún had washed her hair because she had a more valiant husband. In turn, Gudrún went farther up river, declaring that her husband was the more courageous, for he had killed both Fáfnir and Regin, inheriting the property of both! Brynhild reposted with the claim that Sigurd did not ride through the flames to win her, but Gunnar did, and was therefore even more courageous. To that, Gudrún laughed and said, "you think it was Gunnar who rode the flames? The man you slept with was the one who gave me this gold ring and the ring you are wearing and which you received as a wedding gift is called Andvari's treasure" (Sturluson, 1954, pp. 114–115).

Because he had deceived her, Brynhild tried to convince Gunnar and Högni to kill Sigurd, but given that they were sworn brothers to him, they convinced Gotthorm to do it for them. Coming upon Sigurd while he was sleeping, Gotthorm ran him through with a sword. He also killed Sigurd's son, Sigmund. But, as he was dying, Sigurd hurled the lethal sword at Gotthorm and killed him. Grief-stricken, Brynhild fell upon her own sword and her body was burned with that of Sigurd. Gunnar and Högni took Andvari's treasure (Fáfnir's inheritance) and ruled the country thereafter.

In time, Brynhild's brother, Atli Budlason, married Sigurd's widow, Gudrún. Gunnar and Högni accepted an invitation to visit Atli. But first, they hid Andvari's treasure (Fáfnir's inheritance) in the Rhine River. This Rhine gold has never been found.

Atli had his troops set upon his guests, Gunnar and Högni, making them prisoners. He had Högni's heart cut out while Högni still lived; Gunnar he had thrown into a snake pit. Secretly, a harp had been gotten to him. With his hands bound, Gunnar played the harp

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with his toes until his music put all the snakes to sleep, save one. That adder gnawed through Gunnar's breast bone, crawled inside him and fatally buried its fangs in his liver. "Gunnar and Högni are called Niflungar or Gjúkungar; for this reason gold is called the treasure or inheritance of the Niflungar" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 115).

In order to avenge her brothers, Gunnar and Högni, Guðrún killed her two sons by Atli. From their skulls, she had goblets made, decorated in silver and gold. At the funeral feast of the Niflungar, from these goblets Guðrún had Atli served with mead mixed with his boys' blood; their hearts were roasted and served to Atli. When all others were asleep from the intoxicating mead, she and Högni's son made an armed attack on Atli, killing him.

Guðrún went down to the sea and tried to drown herself, but floated on a fjord to the country of *King Jónak*. He took her to his hall and married her. In time *Sörli*, *Hamdir*, and *Erp* were born to them. It was here that Sigurd's daughter, Svanhild, grew to be a lovely woman. *King Jörmunrekk the Mighty* heard of her and sent his son, *Randvér*, to ask in his stead for her hand in marriage. The king was told that given his age, it would be more appropriate for Svanhild to marry Randvér. Hearing that the younger ones were delighted with that plan, Jörmunrekk had Randvér hanged. Upon finding Svanhild sitting and drying her hair as they returned from the hunt, Jörmunrekk and his men rode her down with their horses, trampling her to death.

Upon hearing of Jörmunrekk's murderous deed, Guðrún armed her sons, Sörli, Hamdir, and Erp, and sent them to avenge Svanhild. On their way, the two other sons questioned how committed Erp was. His response was that he would help as the hand helps the foot. Being both dissatisfied with his answer, and having been taunted as she sent them forth, they decided to hurt Guðrún. So, they killed Erp, the son she loved best. When they finally got to Jörmunrekk, his body guards defended him first with weapons, then with stones. With the latter, they killed Sörli and Hamdir. This brought an end to the entire Gjukung or Nibelung line.



We have, then, a story both lengthy and convoluted, deftly and poetically told. It forms a seamless nexus between the myth, proper, and the

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heroic tale. The story demands around twenty lays in the *The Poetic Edda*, an entire Norse saga, a Germanic heroic epic, or four operas for its telling. Each version offers something unique in its rendition, at once adding or omitting details. It involves intricate dealings among a host of beings, representing the gods, Valkyries, giants, mortals, and, of course, dark elves. Keeping their actions in mind is only complicated by the variations in their names which one encounters both within, and even more so, among the several renderings of the story. Old Norse spellings, German spellings, and English transliterations all appear, as well as alternate names such as Gjúkungar, Nibelungs, and Niflungar; or Sigurd and *Siegfried*; or Brynhild, *Brunhild*, *Brunnhilde*. Themes of magic and incest, impulsivity and selfishness, greed and envy, deceit and treachery, cruelty and murder seem overwhelmingly to outweigh love. But love, too, is an ineluctable force which is interwoven in this tangle.

For our purpose, here, we can focus on Andvari (Alberich) as representative of the dark elves. The power of his curse is truly incredible when one considers the concatenation of events which followed. The number and races of beings involved, the plots that emerged, and the time period covered are all astounding. Andvari was a magician of fate. And, as declared by the Scandinavian prince, *Beowulf*, in the eponymous heroic narrative, “Fate goes ever as fate must” (Heaney, 2000, p. 31). We may add, almost parenthetically, “Often when one man follows his own will many are hurt” (p. 207).

Another myth reveals that the dark elves were capable of acts less subtle than a curse and more immediately deadly. In order to understand this myth, some back story is necessary. Snorri (Sturluson, 1954) told the following.



The Aesir and Vanir gods had been at war. When they finally drew a truce, they sealed it by all spitting into a crock. They kept this truce token and guarded that it not be lost by forming from it a man, *Kvasir*. Having been formed from an essential fluid of all the gods and goddesses, he was extremely wise. So much so that no one could ask him a question that he could not answer. He traveled far and wide to teach wisdom to humankind. Two dwarfs, *Fjalar* and *Galar*, invited *Kvasir* to a feast and thereupon murdered him. They directed his blood into two crocks, *Són* and *Bodn*, and the kettle *Óðrörir*. They

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mixed honey into each, and “it became the mead which makes whoever drinks of it a poet and a scholar” (Sturluson, 1954, p. 100). In order to palliate the gods, Fjalar and Galar told them that Kvasir had choked on his own learning because no one could compete with him in knowledge.

Fjalar and Galar invited a giant named *Gilling* and his wife to their home. They asked Gilling to row out to sea with them, rowed into a rock, and upset the boat. Gilling, who could not swim, drowned. Righting the boat, the dwarfs rowed to shore and told Gilling’s wife that this had been an accident. Inviting her to go out the door in order to look out to sea to view where her husband had drowned, Fjalar set a trap. He had his brother climb up over the door and when Gilling’s wife went out, Galar dropped a mill stone on her head. Fjalar said he had been tired of hearing Gilling’s wife wail.

When Gilling’s son, *Suttung*, heard the story, he seized Fjalar and Galar and put them on a skerry covered by the tide. The dwarfs begged Suttung for their lives and offered the precious mead for their lives. Reconciled, Suttung released the dwarfs, accepted the mead, and took it home. He hid the mead in a place called *Hnitbjörg* and set his daughter *Gunnlöd* to guard it.

“This is why we call poetry Kvasir’s blood, or dwarfs’ drink or intoxication, or some sort of liquid of Ódrörir or Bodn or Són, or dwarf ship” (Sturluson, 1954, p. 101).



We can recognize the dwarf as the Norse rendering of an archetype that was limned by Joseph Campbell (1968). “The figure of the tyrant-monster is known to the mythologies, folk traditions, legends, and even nightmares, of the world; and his characteristics are everywhere essentially the same” (p. 15). We see from the above myths that he is “the hoarder of the general benefit,” to use Campbell’s unusual yet poignant adjectival phrase. That is, he is “the monster avid for the greedy right of ‘my and mine.’” We see in the Volsung saga powerful evidence of Campbell’s following point about the tyrant-monster. “The havoc wrought by him is described in mythology and fairy tale as being universal throughout his domain. This may be no more than his household, his own tortured psyche, or the lives that he blights with the touch of his friendship and assistance; or it may amount to the extent of his civilization” (p. 15). A few

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moments of reflection on the saga of the Volsungs with the ripple effects of Andvari's actions across generations drives home this point. Campbell acknowledged, in passing, the skills of this archetypal figure, while at the same time emphasized his aggrandized ego. "The inflated ego of the tyrant is a curse to himself and his world—no matter how his affairs may seem to prosper" (p. 15). In summary, Campbell wrote, "alert at every hand to meet and battle back the anticipated aggressions of his environment, which are primarily the reflections of the uncontrollable impulses to acquisition within himself, the [tyrant-monster] of self-achieved independence is the world's messenger of disaster" (p. 15).

Apropos of the dwarfs' outstanding characteristic of "uncontrollable impulses to acquisition," Alfred Adler (Sharf, 2004), in his personality typology, identified what he termed the "ruling type." Unlike the "socially useful type" who has a high level of activity guided by societal interest, the ruling type lacks in such interest. There is a deficiency here in the sense of community feeling for which Adler used a rather intimidating German word, *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, as we have earlier seen. The activity of those of this personality type is likely to be asocial and their approach to society, thus, dominating and antisocial. Thieves and con artists, therefore exemplify this Adlerian type. We can recognize the dwarf in this.

To encapsulate the dark elves or dwarfs, those denizens of Svartalrheim are ugly and misshapen master craftsmen who are greedy and lustful. They are cunning and not to be trusted, for in their selfishness they eschew loyalty. They are skilled in magic and shapeshifting and can pronounce powerful curses in defense of their hoards. At least some are vulnerable to being turned to stone if exposed to sunlight.

As a metaphor of consciousness, parallels with humankind are clear. "Ugly" and "misshapen" portray personality as surely as physical characteristics. Thus, the physical description of the dwarf may be taken as a symbol for a person whose character and values are repugnant or despicable. "Greedy" and "lustful" surely speak for themselves. It is worth noting, however, that even though these two qualities, the excessive pursuit of material possessions and uncontrollable sexual desires, are separate items on the list of the seven deadly sins, they seem often to go hand in hand. Again, "selfishness," duplicity, and lack of loyalty need no translation. Devious and unscrupulous, this is the Machiavelian personality. Such personalities, through cleverness and guile, sometimes do impressive things which suggest an almost magical touch. They, too, may change their



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appearance, taking one stand now, an opposite stand at another time, dictated by personal expediency. Their selfish actions may, indeed, act as a curse upon those closely associated with them. I suggest that turning to stone if exposed to sunlight, for those who are susceptible, can be considered symbolically; when their underground activities are exposed and their culpable activity is brought to light, a heart of stone is often revealed.

These persons may well show themselves to be master craftsmen in the broadest of senses, creating superb products of all kinds. Even beyond material products, they may be found in communications, finance, and politics. Be it hand-crafting a ring or overseeing a corporate merger, designing a drone or heading a governmental office, this person may be highly skilled. It is this sometimes surprising combination of masterful craftsmanship and personal lacking that is so noteworthy.

It is worth commenting that the personality of the dwarf can be so easily summarized. With minor exceptions, such as the proclivity to turn to stone if exposed to sunlight, there is considerable commonality among dwarfs due to the centrality and pervasiveness of the dual traits of lust and greed in their personality. And, of course, turning to stone is not really a personality trait but more of a physiological leaning.

Gordon Allport is one of the most widely recognized of the psychologists who constructed theories of personality in which *traits* played a central role. Allport distinguished three levels of traits, which he also referred to as *personal dispositions*. These are *cardinal traits*, *central traits*, and *secondary traits*. Without getting bogged down in his rather pedantic definition of the trait or personal disposition, per se, we can focus simply on the differences among the three levels. Suffice it to say, a trait is a determining tendency or predisposition to respond in a particular way. A cardinal trait applies so generally that almost every act of the person possessing it can be accountable to its influence. It is, if you will, a *ruling passion*. A central trait reflects tendencies that are highly characteristic of the person and come into play frequently. The underlying trait, itself, is easily inferred. Whereas cardinal traits and even central traits account for most or at least a great deal of the possessor's behavior, a secondary trait is more limited in its manifestation. It is more focalized in its influence, and therefore less crucial to the description of the personality in question. Too, it comes into play with fewer stimuli (Hall & Lindzey, 1970). Based on the distinction of these three levels of traits, drawn by Allport, we can identify lust and greed as likely cardinal traits of dwarfs. While

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cardinal traits are relatively unusual, these just named seem to qualify in the case of dwarfs. By virtue of the fact that so much of their behavior can be accounted for by these two traits alone, it is easy to delineate a common dwarf personality.

Though known as master craftsmen or smiths, these denizens of Svartalfheim are motivated by lust and greed, the latter taking the active form of selfish acquisition and the passive form of hoarding. Their strength lies in their cleverness, less favorably stated as cunning and guile. Their vulnerability is to being exposed, that is, their ugly and misshapen nature brought to light and their cruelty and hardness of heart revealed. When evincing the dwarfish characteristics identified and elaborated above, a person may be said to be manifesting the consciousness of a dark elf. Svartalfheim thus metaphorically represents a major locus in the cartography of human consciousness.

#### *Jötunheim*

Giants, too, share the middle level of the empyrean trilogy with the dwarfs of Svartalfheim and humans of Midgaard. Known also, using singular forms, as *jötun*, *iötun*, *etin*, *thurs*, *ries*, *risi*, *jätte* (Swedish), *kæmpe* (Danish), *kjempe* (Norwegian), *frost ogre*, or sometimes by the more comprehensive term *troll*, their home is known as Jötunheim. We are told that Jötunheim lies to the east of Midgaard. Interestingly, some scholars, John Lindow (2001) for example, prefer to see the giants as living on the periphery of the world, not in a single place. This land, between the mountains and the sea is *Útgard* (outer enclosure). However, in the later mythological sources, *Útgard* refers to a stronghold within Jötunheim.

Gleaned from his intimate knowledge of the Norse myths, Rossman (2000) proffered the following kernels of definition. Of Jötunheim he wrote simply: “The land of the giants, which lies somewhere to the east of Midgard” (p. 66). Perhaps for consistency with the name of their realm, he chose to use the term *jötun* as the primary term for the giant.

A member of one of the races of giants: the Hill Giants, Frost Giants, and Fire Giants. They seem to vary considerably in size, appearance, and disposition. A number of them possess great wisdom and magical skills, including shape changing. Some of the females are notable for their beauty. Despite the enmity that exists between them, the *Æsir* are descendants of the giants [pp. 64–66].

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Rossmann's latter definition reminds us of the cosmogonic antecedence of the giants, for in the creation story giants come first, then gods, then humans and dwarfs. Recall that as the warm air from Muspell met the frost from Niflheim in Ginnungagap (Open Void), the frost thawed and dripped. Life arose in the fluid that trickled, forming Ymir, the first frost giant. Snorri wrote succinctly and emphatically that all giants have come from Ymir. As a giant, *Vafthrúdnir* supplied his perspective on the origin of his race, while at the same time offering an explanation for their brutish behavior (Sturluson, 1954):

From the Elivágar  
oozed drops of venom  
that grew till they fashioned a giant,  
all our kindred came from thence,  
because of this birth  
they are aye far too barbarous [p. 34].

Odin, himself, stressed that Ymir was not a god; Ymir and his family were malicious frost ogres. When the old frost ogre slept, he perspired and from under his left arm were born two more giants, from one of his legs a son. Thus, the first family of giants arose.

Call to mind that as the frost in Ginnungagap thawed, it became the cow Audhumla. Not only did she feed Ymir from the four rivers that flowed from her teats, but she licked the salty ice, thereby forming Buri. His son Bor married the giantess Bestla, whose father was the giant, Bölthorn. It was, then, Bestla who gave birth to Odin, Vili, and Vé. Bor and Bestla's three sons slew Ymir. The copious blood that flowed from his body drowned all of the frost ogres, save *Bergelmir* and his wife. These two escaped in a crude boat and, in time, propagated a new race of giants. Thus is proven that the frost giants were an earlier life form than the gods. Furthermore, the gods were born of giants.

Recall that one of the roots of Yggdrasil is anchored in Jötunheim. Even though, as earlier discussed, the placement of all three of the roots is not consistent between the accounts in the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*, both sources agree to the placement of one root in Jötunheim. This realm of the giants is thereby one of the three supports for Yggdrasil, the very World Tree. Such is the central importance of this realm. Echoing this importance, Larrington (2002) stated that the Norse cosmos was of three major groupings, those being the gods, humans, and the giants. She noted, however, that in this mythology both humans and giants are

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subordinate to the gods. This lesser importance of the giants is reflected in, if not established by the fact that in post-Ragnarök “some gods and humans will survive, but there is no mention of the giants when the world begins anew” (p.67). Thus, it is the humans and the gods who will begin a new cycle of history together.

Giants, as a whole, are not as clever as the dwarfs. Notwithstanding Rossman’s comment about their variation in size, appearance, and disposition, like the dwarfs, many of the giants seem to have a commonality of personality. That is to say, a personality or consciousness can easily be delineated that applies to most, even if not all giants. If lust and greed encapsulate the personality of the dwarf, then a penchant for *chaos and destruction* does so for the giant. As such, they are the sworn enemies of the gods. The giants and the gods have been set at odds until the time of Ragnarök when their decisive battle will be fought. In modern Norwegian, the use of *kjempe* for giant has its parallel verb form, *å kjempe*, meaning *to fight*. Thus, the very name, itself, calls forth the image of combat.

Their proclivity for chaos and destruction establishes and insures the enmity felt by the gods towards the giants. Added to this is the fact that jötns, like dwarfs, are thievish (Grimm, 1966). In “The Lay of Thrym,” one of the best known poems of *The Poetic Edda*, a tale is told in which the giant, *Thrym* has stolen no less than Thor’s hammer, Mjöllnir (Hollander, 1962).

Despite their mutual enmity, at times intermarriage or at least sexual liaisons came about between the races of gods and giants. Loki, himself, although counted among the Æsir gods, was born of a giant and a goddess. Snorri (Sturluson, 1954) recorded that Loki’s giant father was *Fárbauti* and his mother was *Laufey* or *Nál*. Recall, then, that it was with the giantess, Angrboda, that Loki sired Hel, the Fenrir wolf, and Jörmungand, the Midgaard Serpent. The destructiveness of these three monsters must be attributed to their being three-fourths of giant blood. Recall, too, that so heinous was their nature, Odin had to take extreme measures to contain them. They, of course, will be on the side of the giants come Ragnarök and bring forth more than their share of destruction.

Among the troll women living in the *Iron Wood*, or *Ironwoodites* as they were called, there was an aged one who gave birth to many giant sons. All of them were shaped like wolves. One of these, *Skoll*, chases *Sun* as she drives the horses pulling the chariot of the sun, made from a spark from Muspell to light the worlds. Ahead of Sun, her brother, *Moon*, who

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governs the movement and phases of the moon, is chased by another wolf. The most powerful of the wolf sons, *Mánagarm* (Moon's Dog), will eventually swallow the moon and bespatter the sky with blood. "Because of this the sun will lose its brightness, and the winds will then become wild and rage on every side" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 39). In the end, the sons of the aged Ironwoodite will prevail, for "one of them all especially in form of a troll will seize the sun ... sunlight of summers to come will be black and all weathers bad" (p. 39). Thus, the giants will destroy the sun and the moon, and will cause chaotic, stormy weather.

Before dismissing chaos-cum-destruction as simply inimical and unwelcome, we would do well to consider the relationship between destruction and construction. The cycle of arising, being, and passing away is a core element in the world view espoused within Norse mythology. The phase of passing away is characterized, if not defined, by destruction. Until the destruction of what has been, there is not a place for construction of what will be. Construction and destruction are, then, two sides of the same coin, two inextricably linked processes with the phase of being at their cusp. Just as wave crests cannot exist without wave troughs, or mountains without valleys, destruction and construction cannot exist in isolation. The case is made, thereby, for the crucial importance of the giants, for they are at once both symbols and agents of destruction.

The ineluctable connection between destruction and construction is nicely depicted in the etiological myth concerning Zealand.



King Gylfi, of what is now Sweden, rewarded a beggar-woman "for the way she had entertained him" by offering her as much land as she could plough with four oxen in a day and a night (Sturluson, 1954, p. 29). What the hapless king did not know is that this woman, whose name was *Gefjon*, was far from a beggar-woman, for she hailed from Asgaard! Nor did he know what connections she had with the giants. Gefjon responded to the king's offer by heading to Jötunheim to procure four oxen and a plough. The four oxen happened to be her sons by a giant. "The plough went in so hard and deep that it loosened the land and the oxen dragged it westward into the sea, stopping in a certain sound" (p. 29). Gefjon left the land in place, naming it Zealand. The place that had been torn up was now a lake.



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Destruction of land in what is now Sweden allowed for construction of a large land mass for Denmark. On a subtle level, a case can be stated that the oxen giants were the immediate agents of destruction. Gefjon may have guided, but it was they “who went before broad island-pasture ripped away as loot” and left a hole (Sturluson, 1954, p. 29). It was, then, the goddess Gefjon who placed the land in a promising location, and named it. Notice, too, in the mating of Gefjon and an unnamed giant, we have an additional example of sexual relations between the races from Asgaard and from Jötunheim.

Physically, giants are usually of great stature, and often possess many hands and heads. Not surprisingly, given their size and multiple parts, they often are stiff and unwieldy. On the whole, they are ugly and words such as oafish, loutish, and brutish come to mind. On the other hand, as Rossman (2000) suggested, above, they may be well-shaped and symmetrical. Some giant women are, as he wrote, even beautiful.

In his *Teutonic Mythology* of 1883, Grimm (1966) offered marked insight in the following:

In the giants as a whole, an untamed natural force has full swing, entailing their excessive bodily size, their overbearing insolence, that is to say, abuse of corporal and mental power, and finally sinking under its own weight. ... From this it is an easy step, to impute to the giants a *stupidity* contrasting with man's common sense and the shrewdness of the dwarf [p. 528].

The strength of giants is not only implied by their size, but many myths contain images of their use of great physical power. One of these images arose at Balder's funeral. To summarize:



The gods carried Balder's body down to the sea to put it on *Ringhorn*, his funeral ship. It was a large craft and when it came time to send it out to sea with his funeral pyre, the gods found that they could not move it. Therefore, they sent to Jötunheim for the ogres *Hyrrokkin*. She arrived, incidentally, riding a wolf with two vipers for reins. Hyrrokkin went to the prow of the ship and gave it such a mighty shove that the rollers on which it sat burst into flame and the entire world trembled. Balder's ship was thus launched. His wife, *Nanna*, dying of a broken heart, was added to the pyre, as was an unlucky dwarf who happened to get in Thor's way. The funeral was

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attended not only by gods, but by frost giants, hill giants, and at least one hapless dwarf (Sturluson, 1954).



Making use of their strength, the giants were known as great builders of structures. Recall, for example, the myth discussed much earlier about the giant who contracted to build an impenetrable wall around Valhalla within eighteen months in return for the hand of Freyja, the sun and the moon. To be clear, the giants were, indeed, builders in the sense of mundane work. In terms of day-to-day existence, “their savagery spends itself mainly in hurling huge stones, removing mountains and rearing colossal buildings” (Grimm, 1966, p. 555). In terms of their role in the universe, they were bent on destruction. In this myth just referred to, the surface goal was simply the construction of a wall, while the ultimate goal was the destruction of the sun and the moon and weakening of the gods by the removal of their most beautiful goddess.

Perhaps of some surprise, Grimm (1966) refers to a renowned faithfulness of giants. True to his discipline of philology, his elaboration and the evidence that he cited involve semantics. For instance, Grimm presented an adage in the Faröe dialect, *trúr sum trödlir*, meaning “true as giants” (p. 529).

The rage of giants is well-known, and deserving, in Old Norse, of a word to differentiate it from the rage of the gods. Thus, there appear *iötunmôdr* and *âsmôdr*, respectively. Elaborating on the former, Grimm (1966) wrote:

When their wrath is kindled, the giants hurl rocks, rub stones till they catch fire, squeeze water out of stones, root up trees, twist fir-trees together like willows, and stamp on the ground till their leg is buried up to the knee [p. 530].

When fighting, the giants use stones as weapons—stone clubs and stone shields. They tend not to use swords. Additionally, wrote Grimm (1966), iron swords are not effective against giants. They can, however, be killed by a blow from the pommel of the sword, or with a fist. And, of course, with Mjöllnir, Thor’s hammer.

Keeping the Norse cosmology in mind as our context, we can readily understand Grimm’s (1966) further insight concerning the race of giants. “They stand as specimens of a fallen or falling race, which with the strength combines also the innocence and wisdom of the old world, an

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intelligence more objective and imparted at creation than self-acquired" (p. 529). As for being a fallen or falling race, we know that Ymir, the primogenitor of all giants, fell at the hands of Bor's sons. Then, all but Bergelmir and his wife drowned in the deluge of Ymir's blood. From Bergelmir and his wife arose the families of frost ogres dedicated to the destruction of the gods and most of the nine worlds at the time of Ragnarök. They will bring about the Twilight of the Gods, true, but it is the giants who will be absent in the post-Ragnarök world. Thus, we see a pattern of arising, being, passing away (Ymir), arising, being, passing away (the early tribe of giants), arising, being, passing away (Bergelmir's descendants). Come Ragnarök, the race of giants will ultimately fall.

It is perchance with a certain wistfulness that Grimm (1966) remarked on the fate of the giants as they are most often remembered. "The poets make their giants far less interesting, they paint them, especially in subjects borrowed from Romance poetry.... The Romance giants are often porters and bridge-keepers" (pp. 555–556). And, in stark contrast to the case of gods and goddesses, "of sacrifices offered to giants..., of a worship of giants, there is hardly a trace" (p. 557).

A prime example of the literary trend toward somewhat more tamed and sanitized giants is the lavishly illustrated book *Giants*. Devised by David Larkin (1979) with collaboration of a writer and three illustrators, this book is nearly encyclopedic in its international coverage. It is striking how even the cruelest and most destructive giant is sometimes presented with a touch of humor which lessens the arousal of discomfort, let alone fear or repugnance in the reader. This mitigation is accomplished not only by a comic touch to a number of the illustrations of giants, but by humorous passages inserted into the text. Perhaps, too, the striking beauty of many of the visual images weakens the effect of reading of a giantess who in a rage cut off her son's head, or a giant who hurled poisoned spears at his enemies, or a fearsome giant who hunts and kills wood-wives for sport. In the case of *Giants*, beauty may tame the otherwise savage beast. In addition, numerous examples are related of friendly giants who are helpful to humans.

Grimm would most likely have applauded the view of giants which Peter Watts espoused some eighty years after Grimm's own work. In his introduction to his translation of Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Watts (1966) discussed the large part that trolls play in the story, and in particular, that of a troll called the *Boyg*. Watts opined that English readers are not well



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informed as to the nature of trolls. He therefore sought to rectify such ignorance. In the period in which *Peer Gynt* was published, that exact date being 1867, belief in trolls was still extant in the country districts of Norway. They were believed to be ugly and misshapen, usually oafish and stupid, even grotesque and malevolent. In *Peer Gynt* (Ibsen, 1966), there is mention of trolls with tails, trolls with two heads, and trolls with even three heads, although Peer is told that three-headed trolls have gone out of fashion. In order to give the reader a visual image, the Penguin Classic edition has on its front cover a reproduction of a painting from Nasjonalgalleriet in Oslo, "Forest Troll" by Theodor Kittelson.

As for the Boyg, specifically, he was enormous, a clammy mass that was slippery and quite unpleasant to touch. In a footnote to the story, Watts (1966) explained that the name of this troll derives from the Norwegian word *boje* meaning to bend, suggesting that he was crooked or sinuous, and something to make one change one's course upon encountering him.

There is an enigmatic passage in which a troll known as the Old Man asks Peer Gynt what the difference is between trolls and men. Peer answers that he can see no difference at all. Expanding on this, he suggests that big trolls will eat you and small trolls will claw you, but men would do the same if they dared. With that, the Old Man agreed, and with regard to other respects as well. But, he claimed there is one great difference.

Outside among men, where the skies are bright,  
there's a saying "Man, to thyself be true";  
but here among trolls, the saying runs:  
"Troll, to thyself be—*enough*."

The Old Man then exhorted Peer to use *enough* as his battle cry, calling it a "shattering word of Power" (Ibsen, 1966, p.69).

As difficult to decode as Ibsen's above glance into the psychology of the giant may be, Watts (1966) has given us a more easily understandable, if no less revealing, insight. "They have a lot in common with the *id* of the Freudians—an embodiment of the primitive urges of mankind" (p. 14). To understand this more fully, however, we need to consider the *id*, itself.

Although the term and concept of the *id* is most often associated with Freud, it was not he who first used either. In his 1923 publication of *The Ego and the Id*, Freud acknowledged his borrowing the concept from Georg Groddeck, who in turn found the concept in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. "Groddeck himself no doubt followed the example of Nietzsche,

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who habitually used this natural law” (Freud, 1923, p. 13). It was in this same year, 1923, that Groddeck (1961) published *The Book of the It*. Of more than peripheral interest is the fact that, although Groddeck’s book is theoretical in nature, in format it consists of a series of letters to his imaginary woman correspondent, which he most usually signed as Patrik Troll! The concept was of *das Es*, “the It” in German; English translators chose “the Id” when dealing with Freud’s work.

In his not-to-be-completed 1938 work, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, Freud (1963) wrote, concerning the psychical apparatus of id, ego, and superego, “to the oldest of these mental provinces or agencies we give the name of id. It contains everything that is inherited, that is present at birth, that is fixed in the constitution—above all, therefore, the instincts” (p. 14). And quoting Freud, Fodor and Gaynor (2004) shared that “we can come nearer to the id with images, and call it chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement” (p. 90). Furthermore, “the id knows no values, no good and evil, no morality” (p. 91).

In terms of the MacLean triune model of the brain presented earlier (Cozolino, 2002, Hampden-Turner, 1981), the giant has the neuropsychological functioning of the reptilian brain overlaid with that of the old mammalian brain, but the more complex functions and abilities of a neomammalian brain overlay are but weakly in evidence. That is to say, in terms of the triune brain, the more primitive structures are operative in the giant. To invoke the terminology of Hampden-Turner, it is as if the giant has the neuropsychological functioning of a crocodile plus that of a horse. This would basically include instinctive behaviors involving hunger, sex, and fight-or-flight reactions. In his expansion and clarification, Hampden-Turner offered the following:

The older brains seem involved in the ancestral lore of the species, ie hierarchies of dominance-submission, sexual courtship and display, follow my leader rituals, mass migration, ganging-up on the weak and the new, defending territory, hunting, hoarding, bonding.... While these older brains learn, remember and trigger motor activities, they seem “id like” in their strivings, less unconscious than unable to verbalize their meaning beyond emotive expressions ... basic affects, hunger, thirst, etc., specific affects, pain, shock, repugnance, and general affects, those not tied closely to specific stimuli but motivating behaviours such as searching, aggression, protecting, caressing, rejoicing, sorrowing [p. 80].

Earlier, when exploring the netherworlds, I stated that the functions of the reptilian brain—activation, arousal, homeostasis—fit comfortably into the metaphor of the dynamic balance of the fire of Muspell and the

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ice of Niflheim. So, too, with the Freudian instincts of sex and aggression. In discussing the giants, and now at a higher cosmographical level, we add the functions of the old mammalian brain. The giants thus display consciousness, but fall short of that of the clever yet lustful and greedy dwarfs, let alone that of the humans.

The differences between the giants and the dwarfs are many, and mostly obvious. There are, however, several similarities which are prominent and therefore worthy of mention. First, most giants, like the dwarfs, are ugly and misshapen. The interpretation of the description ugly and misshapen may extend from the physical realm to that of personality in the case of both giants and dwarfs. Second, at least some giants and some dwarfs, as we have seen, are lucifugous. Not only do they shun the light, but if so exposed, they turn to stone. Many of the dealings of giants and dwarfs, alike, are shady; when brought to light, these dark activities foment conflict and earn the anger and vengeance of the gods. Skill at magic, including the ability to shape-shift, is also shared by some dwarfs and giants. In modern Sweden, *trolleri* and *trollkonst* are two words for magic; a *trollkarl*, literally a “troll guy” is a magician. Such similarities between giants and dwarfs, nevertheless, serve only to emphasize their differences when their psychological make-up or consciousness is considered.

How, then, to summarize the giant? Although there are exceptions, as Rossman (2000) has clearly reminded us, the archetypal giant is crude, brutish, and lacking in refinement. Less intelligent than either humans or dwarfs with whom they share the middle level of the Norse cosmography, giants are deficient in acquired knowledge. The image is of a large, oafish figure, powerful and beastly, doltish and strongly id-dominated, ugly and untamed, impulsive and prone to rage, inclined by instinct to bring about chaos and destruction. The jötun as just summarized, as well as Jötunheim as a locus in Norse cosmography, stand as symbols of this level and style of consciousness.

Together, the consciousness of the dwarfs, that of the giants, and that of humans define that of the middle level of the Norse empyrean trilogy. This middle level expands upon the energy dimension of the netherworld and upon its non-conscious inhabitants under the watch of Hel. It does so by allowing a distinct portrait of three races of sentient beings. Each race has distinguishable physical attributes as well as possessing a distinct level of consciousness. These are alive, conscious, and responding beings, yet each a race apart. A case could be made for a hierarchy of conscious-

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ness within this middle level of the empyrean trilogy in which giants are at the lowest level, dwarfs intermediate, and humans at the top. As a map of consciousness, then, one can relate human behavior to these three. A person can act as if a giant, as if a dwarf, or as a human being. However, these three loci on the map of consciousness seem ordinary and, at least in the case of giants and dwarfs, frequently represent less than laudable behavior. More worthy of attention in this regard are those realms found in the upper world.

## The Upper World

### *Asgaard, Vanaheim and Alfheim*

Upon arriving at the upper world of the Norse cosmography, we find, according to the *Prose Edda* (Sturluson, 1954), that there are three levels here within the heavens. The first contains Asgaard, Vanaheim, and Alfheim. Snorri relates that there is another heaven to the south of and above this one. It is named *Andlang* (Outstretched). Still farther above is a third heaven, *Vidbláin* (Wide Blue). It is said that here at the southern end of heaven may be where *Gimlé* (Lee-of-fire), the most beautiful hall of all, can be found. Furthermore, Snorri relates that the highest heaven may be inhabited by light elves. So, three heavens are conceived at the highest major level of the empyrean trilogy of Norse mythology.

As we look to the gods and goddesses who inhabit Asgaard and Vanaheim, we find cases of overlapping functions and inconsistent stories. This is not surprising, given that the myths were not written down until quite late in their history, and given the long period during which these divinities came into being, prevailed, and declined in popularity. The time period is striking.

Thor ... was probably worshipped as early as the Stone Age by tribes who lived by fishing and hunting. Freyr, the god of fertility, is naturally to be connected with the agricultural peoples of the last part of the Stone Age and the Bronze Age. Odin, on the other hand, did not make his Appearance until the Iron Age [*The Viking*, 1975, p. 142].

### *Asgaard*

Asgaard is the home of the Æsir, the warrior race of gods and goddesses. It is, of course, located high above in the first level of the heavens.

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Within the *Prose Edda*, in “The Deluding of Gylfi,” Snorri (Sturluson, 1954) relates that there are many magnificent places in heaven. Within Asgaard are Balder’s dwelling, *Breidablick* (Gleaming-far-and-wide); Forseti’s *Glit-nir* (Radiant Place) with its walls and posts of red gold and its roof of silver; and Heimdall’s *Himinbjörg* (Mount-of-heaven), which is located near the upper end of *Bifröst*. Built by the Æsir, this sturdy bridge connects the earth with the upper world. It is of three colors, and is known by some as the rainbow. By means of *Bifröst*, the gods and goddesses can descend to the middle worlds and, then on rare occasion, even take from there the downward road to Hel. And, at the southern end of heaven is *Valaskjálf* (Hall-of-the-slain). This hall may be associated with Odin’s son or Odin, himself, and may even be another name for Valhalla (Rossman, 2000).

A great many Æsir gods and goddesses live in Asgaard, and more than a few possess such special qualities that they deserve to be portrayed individually. Odin, for instance, tells us that “the divine gods are twelve in number.” To which he immediately adds, “the goddesses are not less sacred and no less powerful” (Sturluson, 1954, p. 48). His list of twelve gods is in addition to Kvasir, to Loki, and to himself. His list of goddesses is eighteen in number. Some of the gods and the goddesses have already been encountered in the discussions of other beings of the nine worlds and in stories in which they have jointly been involved.

Before considering each of these gods and goddesses individually, it is important to recognize that although the Æsir are sometimes distinguished from the Vanir of Vanaheim, the two races came together. For a long period, they were at war. Finally, a truce was reached and representatives of each race were exchanged and were to live with the foreign race to help insure ongoing peace. To this end, the Æsir sent Hoenir and the giant Mimir; the Vanir sent Frey and Njord. In the post-war period, the term *Æsir* is sometimes used for all gods and goddesses, including the Vanir. Knowing both this history and the convention of using the name *Æsir* inclusively can help to minimize some otherwise confusing situations.

Turning to the first of the twelve divine gods, *Thór* (Thor) is the foremost by Odin’s own account. He is “the god who rules over clouds and rain, who makes himself known in the lightning’s flash and the rolling thunder, whose bolt cleaves the sky and alights on the earth with deadly aim” (Grimm, 2012, p. 166). Perhaps as allusion to lightning, he is defined in part by his fiery red beard. He is sometimes called *Ása-Thór* (Thor of the Æsir), *Thór-the-charioteer*, or *Wagon-Thor*, the latter two names

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deriving from the fact that he often drives about in a chariot pulled by two he-goats named *Tooth-gnasher* and *Gap-tooth*. He does not ride a horse and seems not to own one; he drives or walks. And, of course, the sound of rumbling thunder can easily lead the imagination to the vision of a wagon rattling over the vaulted sky. Two aspects of thunder are at once brought to mind. First, it suggests an angry and avenging god, one who may punish with the storm. His divine rage is well-known in the mythos. At the same time, and secondly, the thunderstorm provides the essential rain for the growing of crops. He clears the atmosphere, sends needed showers, and his sacred tree, the oak, brings acorns. Considered jointly, these two aspects of the thunder god lend Thor a certain complexity well worth contemplating. But, as Grimm observed, “to the Norse mind indeed, Thor’s victories and his battles with the giants have thrown his peaceful office quite into the shade” (p. 176).

Actually, Odin is his father; his mother *Jörd*, a giantess and at the same time a personification of Earth. Thus, the origins of both his divinity and his remarkable strength. He is the strongest of all gods and men. Often he is impulsive in his actions and slow to understand, qualities that are perhaps further inheritance from his mother. We would be accurate in saying that he is more action-oriented than insight-oriented.

*Thrúðvangar*, or Plains-of-power is the name of the kingdom over which he rules. Within his kingdom he has a hall called *Bilskirnir* (Strong) which boasts more than six-hundred and forty floors. This is the largest hall known (Sturluson, 1954).

Thor has three precious possessions that serve him in his battles against the giants. First, we are already familiar with Mjöllnir, his magical hammer made by the dark elves, Eitri and Brokk in the episode begun when Loki cut off the hair of Thor’s wife Sif. Thor also has a belt of strength that doubles his power when he buckles it on. And third, he has a pair of iron gauntlets that are required for him to grip the handle of Mjöllnir. Armed with these possessions, Thor gained renown for his countless and mighty deeds, primarily killing giants and giantesses.

At the time of Ragnarök, Thor will engage in final battle with the Midgard Serpent. Although he will slay Jörmungand in this contest, the beast will spray him with poison; Thor will stagger back but nine steps before he, too, will fall down dead (Sturluson, 1954).

Before leaving Thor, it may be of interest to account for the whetstone that sits in his head!

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Odin once rode to Jötenheim alone, and came upon the giant, *Hrungnir*. Seeing this rider riding over air and sea on a remarkably fine horse, *Hrungnir* asked for his name. Odin simply replied, wagering his head, that no horse in Jötenheim was as fine. Countering that his, *Gullfaxi* (Gold-mane), was the finer, *Hrungnir* lost his temper, mounted, and galloped after Odin to collect. But, riding in his rage, *Hrungnir* did not notice that he had crossed the gates into Asgaard. Offered drink, *Hrungnir* settled in and drank himself into intoxication. Having imbibed without reservation, the giant began to boast that he would pick up Valhalla and carry it to Jötenheim, sink Asgaard into the sea, and kill all the gods and goddesses except for Freyja and Sif, whom he would take home with him. Tired of his threats, the gods summoned Thor. Enraged, Thor entered the hall, *Mjöllnir* in the air, and demanded to know by what authority a giant was in the hall being served by Freyja. In spite of being told that *Hrungnir* was there by Odin's invitation and under his safe conduct, Thor nevertheless threatened that the giant would rue ever coming to Asgaard. Explaining that he had come without his shield, *Hrungnir* convinced Thor that to slay an unarmed foe would not enhance Thor's reputation, but that he would gladly do battle on the frontier at *Gjótúnagardar* (Stone Fence House). This was the first time that anyone had challenged Thor to a duel, so he readily agreed to single combat. *Hrungnir* had a hone on his shoulder for his weapon of attack and beside him was a clay giant, *Mist Calf*. Thor was such an imposing figure that, as for the clay giant, "it is said that it made water when it saw Thor" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 104). *Thjálfi*, who had accompanied Thor to *Gjótúnagardar*, warned *Hrungnir* that he had best put his shield on the ground beneath him, for Thor would surely come at him from below. Thereupon, Thor hurled his hammer, accompanied by claps of thunder and flashes of lightning. *Hrungnir* flung his hone. The two weapons collided in mid-air, the whetstone smashing to bits. One part fell to the ground, and from these fragments have come all hone quarries. The other part pierced Thor's head, wounding and dropping him to the ground. *Mjöllnir*, however, true as always, hit the giant in the head, killing him. *Thjálfi* easily dispatched *Mist Calf*.



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When Thor returned home, a sibyl named *Gróa*, and wife of *Aurvandil the Brave*, recited spells that worked the hone loose. Wanting to reward *Gróa*, Thor told her about how he had waded a river with *Aurvandil* in a basket on his back and thereby brought her husband out of the land of the giants. As proof, Thor related that one of *Aurvandil's* toes had stuck out of the basket and became frozen. Thor had cut it off and thrown it into the sky, forming the star known as *Aurvandil's Toe*. Furthermore, said Thor, *Aurvandil* would soon come home. So excited was *Gróa* by this news, that she forgot her spells and was unable to work the hone any looser. Thus, the whetstone is still stuck in Thor's head. It is therefore that hones should not be thrown across the floor, for if that is done, the one in Thor's head is moved (Sturluson, 1954).



As mentioned, Thor slew not only male, but female giants as well. In another myth, Snorri documents this and reveals not only something of Thor, but something of Loki (Sturluson, 1954).



Once when Loki was amusing himself, flying about in Frigg's falcon coat, his curiosity got him caught by a giant named *Geirröd*. The giant locked Loki up in a chest and kept him for three months, starving him until Loki admitted who he was and agreed to bring Thor to *Geirröd*, lacking his weapons. We are told that Thor came to stay with *Gríð*, a giantess and mother of *Vidar the Silent*. It seems that she, herself, had a belt of strength and iron gloves, in addition to which she had a staff, *Gríð's stick*. She lent these to Thor and warned him that *Geirröd* posed a dangerous enemy.

When Thor and Loki reached the mighty river *Vimur*, Thor donned the belt of strength and leaned on *Gríð's* stick to cross, Loki hanging onto the belt. At midstream, the water reached Thor's shoulders. It was then that he saw on a rocky ravine *Geirröd's* daughter, *Gjálp*. As she stood astride the river, it was she who made the river rise. Shouting that a river must be dammed at its fountain-head, Thor threw a bolder and hit her. The rowan tree is known as Thor's salvation, for it was such a tree that Thor grabbed and by which he pulled Loki and himself from the river.

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Arriving, Thor was taken to a goat shed, where he sat down on the single chair provided. The chair began to rise, taking him toward the roof. Setting Grid's stick firmly against the roof and pushing himself downward with his great strength, he heard screaming and a loud crash. Geirröd's two daughters, Gjálp and Greip, who had been under the chair, thanks to Thor, now had broken backs.

Geirröd had Thor called into his hall to compete in games of skill. Using a pair of tongs, the giant picked up a red-hot bolt of iron and threw it at Thor. Thor caught it in his borrowed iron gloves and returned it as Geirröd ran behind an iron pillar. Thor's aim was true, his return forceful, and the bolt penetrated the pillar, Geirröd, and wall as well.



There is a rather long and elaborate myth centering on Thor which contains some rather interesting symbolism. It can be divided conveniently into three parts, namely Thor's gaining of Thjálfí and his brother Röskva as bondservants, journeying with Skrymir, and the contests in the hall of *Utgard-Loki*. Following is a portion of that myth with emphasis on the third part.



During a journey on which Loki and Thor's bondservants accompanied him, the four came upon someone who identified himself as Skrymir (Big Fellow). They decided to pool their provisions and continue together. Angered at not being able to untie the provisions which had been tied by Skrymir, Thor raised his hammer to him as he slept. Three times Thor struck, but to no avail. In the morning, Skrymir departed and Thor and his party continued their journey.

In time, they came upon a stronghold on a plain. Squeezing between the bars of the gate, they entered a great hall. Big men sat on benches within, and there, too, was the king, Utgard-Loki. With contempt, the king greeted them and put in words that anyone who was allowed to stay was required to be a master of some craft or skill.

Loki stepped forth, claiming skill at fast eating. Utgard-Loki called upon *Logi* to challenge Loki. A trencher of chopped meat was brought, and each man began eating as rapidly as he could from one

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end. Everyone agreed that Loki had lost when his opponent ate not only the meat, but the wooden server as well. One of Thor's young bondservants, Thjálfi, was next pitted against one of Utgard-Loki's lads, *Hugi*, in a foot race. Thjálfi was badly defeated in three consecutive races. Thor was next challenged. In keeping with his reputation for being able to quaff, he proposed a drinking contest. A long drinking horn was brought to Thor. With three great draughts, he tried, but failed to empty the horn. Given another try to demonstrate some accomplishment, and after further taunting, Thor agreed to try to lift Utgard-Loki's cat from the floor. Try as he did, but one paw came off the floor. Now with anger, Thor called for a wrestling match. Utgard-Loki selected an old woman, his foster mother, *Elli*. Though the struggle was tremendous, Elli emerged the winner. Following this contesting, Thor and his party stayed the night and were given hospitality.

Upon their departure the next morning, Utgard-Loki admitted that Thor had nearly landed his hall in disaster. Then, he confessed that he had tricked Thor and his party with magical spells. Skrymir was, of course, Utgard-Loki, himself. *Logi* was wildfire. *Hugi* was Utgard-Loki's thought. The horn from which Thor drank had its end in the sea. But, although Thor failed to empty the sea, he did create what ever more is known as the ebb-tide. As for the cat, that was the Midgard Serpent. And no one, if he or she lives long enough, is not tripped up by Elli, old age. Not surprisingly, Thor raised his hammer when hearing that he had been deceived. But, he saw no Utgard-Loki, no stronghold, only the spacious plains (Sturluson, 1954).



In the above myth, Utgard-Loki departs from the oafish image we often attribute to the giants. He is clever and adept at magic spells. Not only did he trick Thor, but he tricked Loki the trickster! The error, really, was not in being put under a spell, but in failing to understand the names of their opponents, where apparently proper names were in fact forms of common nouns. In Old Norse, *logi* means flame or fire, for instance, and *elli* means age. Perhaps, this reflects that it is Odin who possess extreme linguistic abilities, not his son, Thor.

Thor is at the vanguard of the Æsir's battle to stanch the flow of chaos brought about by the thurses. It is he who battles, time and again, one-

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on-one with the giants. As a model of consciousness, then, we can characterize Thor as dedicated to opposing chaos and destruction where he sees it. He is strongly action-oriented and determined, but he sometimes lacks the more detailed insight that would better guide him. He is easily angered and his frequently evoked rage can send ripples of fear toward those who are about him. At the same time, he is highly appreciated for his readiness to step forward in a crisis. While he lacks brilliance, he possesses both moral strength and awareness of his great physical strength. He combines a spark of divinity with an attractive lack of pretense.

The second of the twelve divine gods is another of Odin's sons, *Balder*. His mother is Odin's wife Frigg and his wife is Nanna. Of Balder, we learn there is nothing but good to be told. He is so attractive that a splendor radiates from him. He is sometimes called Balder the *Beautiful* or *Balder the Good*. Odin says that Balder is the wisest of the gods, sweet-spoken and merciful. Interestingly, however, once he has made a judgement, it can never be altered. Thus, he is the very symbol not only of wisdom and goodness, but of a doughty spirit, resolve and fortitude. As noted above, his dwelling place in Asgaard is known as Breidablik.

There is a myth fraught with symbolism in which Balder plays a major role. In its complexity, "Balder's Dreams" offers important insights into several other figures as well. Following is an elaboration of the synopsis presented earlier when offering an example of the oft found unhappy endings in myths as opposed to fairy tales.



Balder was disturbed, for he dreamed that he would lose his life. For this, he sought counsel from the other gods. After consideration, they decided that protection should be provided from every possible danger. Frigg, who knows the fates of all men, agreed to seek an oath from each peril not to bring harm to her son. She was able to extract such promises from both fire and water, all of the animals, from metals and stones, ailments and poisons, and the earth itself. This having been accomplished, the Æsir made sport of throwing rocks and darts at him or hitting him; all delighted in his immunity. All except Loki, however, who was annoyed. Disguised as a woman, Loki traveled to *Fensalir*, Frigg's place of dwelling. In the course of their conversation, Loki, using his guile, extracted from Frigg just the sort of thing that he sought. He learned from her that Frigg had not obtained the oath

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in question from every danger. To the west of Valhalla grew a plant known as mistletoe. Frigg had judged it as too young to be of danger to Balder and so had not sought the oath that she had gotten from all of the dangers that she recognized.

With this dangerous information, Loki picked some mistletoe and returned to the assembly of the Æsir. Loki approached the blind god Höd and asked him why he was not participating in the amusement with his brother, Balder. Höd reminded Loki that he could not see, in addition to which he had nothing to throw. In his cunning way, Loki offered both to supply a twig to throw and to direct Höd in throwing it, so that Höd would honor Balder as the others were doing. Directed by Loki, Höd threw the dart at Balder. This mistletoe dart pierced Balder through, and he fell to the ground dead.

When the gods and goddesses overcame their shock, Frigg stepped forward and asked who would win her favor by riding to Hel to ransom her fallen son. Another of Odin's sons, called *Hermod the Bold*, undertook the ride astride Odin's own horse, Sleipnir. Riding through valleys so deep and so dark that he could see nothing for nine nights, he finally reached the icy river of Niflheim known as Gjöll, close to Hel gate, and crossed the bridge. Thereupon, he was challenged by *Módgud*, the maiden who guards that bridge. He explained his mission, and Módgud affirmed that Balder had, indeed, passed there. Hermod rode on to the gates of Hel, whereupon Sleipnir jumped over the gate, clearing it with ease.

Hermod rode to the hall and therein found his brother, Balder. After staying the night, Hermod met with Hel and asked for Balder to ride back to Asgaard with him, for the gods and goddesses were weeping so. Hel proposed to test whether Balder was as loved as his reputation proclaimed. If everything, dead and alive alike, will weep for him, then he may return to the Æsir. If, however, anyone objects or refuses to weep, Balder will remain with Hel. Balder removed the ring Draupnir to be sent to Odin before Hermod rode back to the Æsir.

When Hermod returned and related what had occurred, the Æsir sent out messengers to ask for Balder to be wept out of Hel. Everyone and everything did just that. Incidentally, one can still witness the weeping of the stones and metals, trees and the earth, and so forth as they come out of the frost and meet with the warmth. The messengers did well, but then in a cave they met a giantess named

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*Thökk*. She said she would weep but dry tears, for she had no use for Balder. Hel could hold what she had.

It is thought that *Thökk* was actually *Loki*. So, *Loki* caused Balder's death, then prevented his release from Hel. *Loki* had much to answer for, and vengeance would be taken (Sturluson, 1954).



"Balder's Dreams" offers a great deal to ponder, from the delightful explanation of the tears of thawing, which surely invites a smile, to the thought-provoking consideration of the symbolism of mistletoe. At the same time, it gives us glimpses of the familial bonds of the *Æsir* as well as an introduction to two of its minor gods, *Höd*, and *Hermod*. Too, it offers insight into the nature of Hel; although she will negotiate, her terms are extreme and she is adamant about the outcome. *Loki's* treachery is firmly established in both its immediately cruel and catastrophic mien and in its aura of *casus belli*, an act provoking war. But this story is for another time when our focus is on *Loki*.

As for Balder, himself, it is obvious that he symbolizes personal beauty and goodness, wisdom, and mercy, firmness of judgment and strength of character. Within the ethos of the *Æsir*, where raw courage is paramount, Balder adds this further dimension. He is pure and represents much to be admired and emulated, and may lessen some of the harshness that is characteristic of his warrior culture.

Named as the third god by *Odin* is *Njörd* (*Njord*). Although he was raised in *Vanaheim*, and is therefore not of the *Æsir*, he was sent to the *Æsir* as part of the reconciliation exchange between the two divine races. His personal abode is known as *Nóatún* (Ship-yard). Invoked for good fortune in seafaring and fishing, *Njord* is able not only to still both sea and fire, but to control the path of the wind. Surprisingly, this wealthy god is also able to offer abundance of land and property when appropriately called upon.



*Njord's* wife is *Skadi*, daughter of the giant *Thjazi*. Conflict of desires arose between *Skadi* and *Njord* when *Skadi* longed for the mountains, but *Njord*, not surprisingly, wanted to live by the sea. They reached a seemingly workable compromise by agreeing to live for nine nights in a place called *Thrymheim* (Storm-home), in the

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mountains, alternating with nine nights at Nóatún. Pragmatism, however, did not prevail long. Njord loathed it at Thrymheim. He found the howling of the wolves not to his liking, and greatly preferred the hooping of swans. The call of the birds at the sea, too, displeased Skadi. Therefore, she returned to her sire's Thrymheim to live. Here, in the mountains, she hunts on skis with bow and arrow. Fair of face, she is known as the *Snow-shoe goddess*, or the *Snow-shoe divinity* (Sturluson, 1954).



What can be made of the choice of Njord and Skadi to live apart? Perhaps they stand as symbolic reminder of the notion that strong preferences may not yield to pragmatic compromise. Perchance, this mythos suggests, too, that one's background may leave indelible traces that strongly help to determine one's course in life. As such, this myth may be seen as a teaching story, a story of instruction from the gods.

Njord had two children by his sister, *Ingun*, the god *Frey* and the goddess *Freyja*, both of whom we have encountered previously. Their names mean Lord and Lady, respectively. These names are in keeping with both the beauty and the prominence of these siblings. They are alike in their attributes. Frey's importance is attested to in our previous meetings with him. He was sent by the Vanir to live with the Æsir as part of the peace. As for his standing among the Æsir, Frey decides when the sun shall shine and when the rain shall fall. Thereby, he is involved in the fruitfulness of the earth. He is known as the god of peace and plenty, so for both peace and prosperity, he is invoked. It is Frey who will meet Surt at Ragnarök, and Frey will fall. His wife is *Gerd*, and their courtship has an interesting form, as follows.



Gerd was a beautiful woman, the daughter of Gymir and a giantess named *Aurboda*. One day Frey went to Odin's high seat and was looking over the whole world. He saw Gerd, and as she lifted her arms to open her door, the whole world was illuminated by her radiance. Thus, he paid for his presumption. For sitting in Odin's holy seat, he now pined away for his love of Gerd. He refused to drink or to speak to anyone. Noticing this, Njord summoned Skirnir, Frey's chamberlain, to see what was wrong. Reluctantly, Skirnir did so, and

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learned of Frey's infatuation. Frey asked Skirnir to go in his stead and ask Gerd's father if Frey could have her for his own. Skirnir agreed, but only if Frey would lend him his magic sword, a sword that fought by itself. Frey agreed, and Skirnir went on his errand. Skirnir wooed Gerd for Frey, and Gerd agreed that she would marry Frey at *Barry*, nine nights hence. Frey declared that one night of waiting would be long, two nights would be long, but how could he endure three! Incidentally, this story explains why Frey was without his sword when he met Surt at Ragnarök.



Next, Odin spoke of *Tyr*. He is most clearly a warrior god and has power over victory in battle. Snorri (Sturluson, 1954) tells us that one who does not waiver in battle is called *Tyr-valiant*. Hollander (1962) suggested in a footnote in his translation of *The Poetic Edda* that Tyr was the predecessor of Odin, and that "in Old Norse mythology Tyr is more specifically the god of war" (p. 84). Odin is sometimes even referred to as *Sigtyr* (*Victory-Tyr*). The identity of Tyr's parents is problematic. By way of setting Tyr and Odin in apposition, Grimm (2012) stated the following:

Represented in the Edda as Odin's son, he may seem inferior to him in power and moment; but the two really fall into one, inasmuch as both are directors of war and battle, and the fame of victory proceeds from each of them alike [p. 196].

Rossman (2000), on the other hand, states that Tyr is the son of the giant Hymir. As for Tyr's mother, she is one of two giantesses, one of whom is a loathsome creature with 900 heads. In any case, even though he is counted among the *Æsir*, Tyr is born of at least one giant.

Interestingly, it is said that Tyr is also well-informed, and thus a knowledgeable man may be referred to as *Tyr-wise*. That the third day of the week (Tuesday) is named for him reflects his importance. Likewise, the fact that there is a rune in the Viking rune set devoted to him demonstrates his standing. More about the runes later.

Most dramatic was Tyr's appearance in the scenario of the binding of the Fenrir wolf. Recall that when Odin recognized the threat that was posed by Loki's monster children by the giantess Angrboda (Jörmungand, Hel, and Fenrir), he decided to mitigate the danger. After trying to bind him twice, unsuccessfully, the ultimate binding was obtained from a dwarf, the binding Gleipnir. Fenrir, however, agreed to be enfettered only if the



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gods would agree to release him if he could not himself break the binding. As a show of good faith, Tyr agreed to put his right hand in Fenrir's mouth. When Fenrir discovered he could not break free, and the gods refused to release him from his bond, he bit off Tyr's hand. Thus, the point where Tyr's hand was bitten off is known as the *wolf-joint* (Sturluson, 1954). Tyr will encounter another wolf at the time of Ragnarök. *Garm*, the hound of Hel, will break his fetters and attack the gods. He and Tyr will do battle to a mutual demise.

We see in Tyr not only a god of war, but a god of sacrifice. In this latter aspect, there is surely complexity. Was Tyr foolish or noble? And, were the gods justified in not keeping their word in order to eliminate the threat of Fenrir? Was the shackling of Fenrir worth a hand?

*Bragi* is known for wisdom, and more specifically for eloquence with words. In Old Norse, *bragr* means *poetry*, for Bragi knows most about the poet's art. Thus, he is the god of poetry. His wife is the goddess *Idun* (One-who-renews). More of her, later.

The warder of the gods is *Heimdall*. Rig is the name he used when he visited the three households and begot the three races of humans. He has a closer connection to an animal, namely the ram, than any other god. The form of his name, *Heimdali* is, in fact, a word for ram (Lindow, 2001). He sits at the edge of the heavens in Himminbjörg and guards Bifröst from the giants who may try to cross it. He is the consummate watchman, for it is said that he requires less sleep than a bird, and can see a hundred leagues by night or by day. His hearing is so keen that he can hear grass growing or the wool growing on sheep, as well as anything that is louder. He will warn of the coming of the giants with a blast of his horn, *Gjöll*, the blare of which can be heard over all the nine worlds.

Heimdall is known as the *white god*, for he is both great and holy. In keeping with such status Heimdall seems to have had an auspicious origin. According to Snorri, he said of himself, "of nine mothers I'm the son, and son of nine sisters too" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 54). Snorri refers to these as maidens. If we take all of this as meaning nine virginal sisters, then Heimdall came into being through a virginal birth, times nine! Other names that he is called are *Hallinskídi* and *Goldtooth*, for his teeth are of gold. This theme of gold is carried further, for his horse is called *Goldtuft*. He and Loki will pair off and kill one another at Ragnarök.

Both blind and strong, *Höd* is the god who was duped by Loki to kill Balder unintentionally with a sprig of mistletoe. Loki was well-known as

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a trickster. Therefore, we must wonder at Höd's gullibility. At the very least, we are instructed by Höd's example of the risk and even possibly grim consequence of being overly trusting. Again, we have here a lesson from the gods. Höd will survive Ragarnok.

In difficult situations, the gods rely heavily on *Vidar*, a son of Odin. He is the silent god, *Vidar the Silent*, and almost as strong as Thor. He may have gotten his strength from his mother, the giantess Gríð. (Recall that Thor stayed with Gríð and borrowed her gauntlets, her belt of strength, and her most useful stick on his way to battle with the giant Geirröð.) Vidar will avenge his father by killing Fenrir after it has swallowed Odin at Ragnarök. Vidar possesses a special shoe made of the scraps of leather cut from the toes and heels of other shoes which will allow him to place one foot on Fenrir's lower jaw while forcing its upper jaw upward with his hand. In another version, he will use a sword for the slaying. Vidar will, then, survive.

*Váli* or *Áli* is a son of Odin and *Rind*. Lindow (2001) revealed that "the relationship between Odin and Rind was apparently not a normal one. [an Icelandic source written circa 960] says that Odin used magic (*seid*) on Rind, presumably to beget Váli" (p. 262).

Váli is known to be bold in battle and to be a very good shot. When he was but one night old, Váli avenged the death of his brother, Balder, by slaying Höd. Not only is his age at the time of his slaying of Höd worthy of attention, but this makes his abstention from grooming seem curious. As noted in *The Poetic Edda* (Hollander, 1962, p. 7):

Neither cleansed his hands      nor combed his hair  
till Baldr's slayer      he sent to Hel.

Lindow (2001) has suggested that Váli's absence of grooming and the silence of his brother, Vidar, may be parallel acts of more than a little significance. These may be abstentions that serve to elevate, as well as to presage their respective feats of vengeance. Along with his brother, Vidar, Váli will survive Ragnarök.

*Ull* is the god to call upon in duels. Son of Sif and stepson of Thor, he is unrivaled in archery and skiing. Ull has been called god of skis, bows, hunting, and shields. Snorri (Sturluson, 1954) attests that he is handsome, and possesses all of the characteristics of a warrior.

Of the twelve gods named by Odin, the last is *Forseti*. He is the son of Balder and Nanna. *Glitnir* is the name of his heavenly hall, and "there

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Forseti spends all day long settling all suits-at-law" (Sturluson, 1954, p. 55). Glitnir is the best of all courts, and all disputes brought there are reconciled.

Although not included by Odin in his list of twelve divine gods, there is yet *Kvasir*. Perhaps, Odin did not mention Kvasir because of the latter's rather late arrival on the mythological scene. Recall that he was formed from the spittle of all the Æsir and Vanir at the time of their truce. Thereby, he was formed from their bodily fluids, symbolic of their essences. Consider that the gods and goddesses are divine embodiments of various archetypal forms, some of them extremely complex while others more unidimensional in their representation. Taken together, they cover the gamut of human feelings and behavior. In a sense, then, Kvasir was complete or whole in his containment of all such essences. This accounts for his wisdom. "Kvasir, the wisest of the Aesir" (Ellis Davidson, 1964, p. 37) traveled widely teaching wisdom. This sagacity is demonstrated in a myth wherein Kvasir and Loki are pitted against one another in a battle of wits. Following is a précis of that myth.



The gods were furious with Loki after he took a hand in the killing of Balder and preventing Balder from being redeemed from Hel. Loki fled to a mountain and built there a house with four doors, one facing each direction. Thereby, he could see if anyone approached. Often, though, he would venture forth to the waterfall of *Fránang* and hide himself in the shape of a salmon. He tried to imagine how the gods might try to capture him in the waterfall. In his imaginings, he took some linen twine and formed a mesh. In this manner, he invented the fishing net. From his high seat, one day, Odin had spotted Loki and the gods went after him. When he saw them approach, Loki threw his net into the fire and dove into the river. Of the pursuit party, Kvasir entered the house first. Kvasir proved his astuteness when he looked at the ash where Loki's net had burned, and recognized that it had been a contraption for catching fish. The gods proceeded, then, to form an imitation of what Kvasir had seen. Going to the waterfall, the gods cast their net, Thor holding one end. Twice Loki escaped the net. Thereupon, Thor waded into the water and the gods began driving Loki toward the sea. He had two chances. He could go out to sea, risking his life, or he could

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leap over the net. Trying the latter, he leapt into the air. Thor caught him, and as Loki began to slip out of Thor's hand, Thor clutched at him and held him by the tail. Incidentally, this is why salmon taper toward their tails (Sturluson, 1954).



This story demonstrates Kvasir's superior wit among the gods. The story continues, but that becomes Loki's horrendous tale.

The very name of Kvasir carries significant implication. *Kvas* is a word for strong beer used by the eastern neighbors of the Germans, and has been used in Jutland for crushed fruit (Ellis Davidson, 1964). The use of saliva as an early method to begin the fermentation process, then, may complete the picture of Kvasir as the embodiment of the brew of the gods as well as of their essence. Or, as told in the myth, jealous of his wisdom, the dwarfs Fjalar and Galar invited Kvasir to a feast and thereupon murdered him. They directed his blood into two crocks, Són and Bodn, and the kettle Ódrörir. They mixed honey into each, and thereby brewed the sublime mead of inspiration. Kvasir is the embodiment of that mead.

Remaining are *Loki* and, of course, Odin, himself. Although there is more to say of them, a copious amount has already been revealed throughout earlier discussions. Turning first to Loki. He has been called the *mischiefmonger*, but more severely, the *father-of-lies*, and the *disgrace-of-gods-and-men*! (Sturluson, 1954). He is the trickster god. In his earlier appearances in the myths, Loki appears like the trickster archetype described by Anthony Stevens (1999) as resembling "an undisciplined and uninitiated adolescent boy" (pp. 273–274). Stevens went on to say that such a trickster has creative importance for his "spontaneity and unfettered liveliness" (p. 274). These qualities are fitting for the Loki who as a prank cut off Sif's hair. When the societal stew is stagnant, this kind of trickster can stir the pot.

Although counted among the Æsir, Loki was born son of the giant Fárbauti; his mother was Laufey or Nál, most likely a giantess, but possibly a goddess. The ill-will toward the gods that so frequently erupts in Loki is perhaps because of this lineage. Snorri (Sturluson, 1954) tells us that Loki always cheats, and that he exceeds all others in cunning. In his later appearances, Loki becomes truly menacing. Recall, for instance, his involvement in the death of Balder and in the gods' subsequent failure to

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save Balder from the clutches of Hel. Here, then, is a summary of what became of Loki after Thor caught him, in salmon form, by the tail.



The gods took Loki to a cave and bound him. They created bonds from the entrails of Loki's son, Narfi. After capturing Loki's two sons, *Vali* and *Narfi* or *Nari*, they turned Vali into a wolf. The wolf tore his brother apart. With those entrails, the gods bound Loki through three large stones in which they had drilled holes. One bond passed under Loki's shoulder, one beneath his loins, and one under his knees. These bonds became iron. Skadi fastened a poisonous snake above Loki such that its venom drips onto Loki's face. *Sigyn*, Loki's wife, sits beside him holding a bowl to catch the venom. But, when the bowl fills and she has to empty it, the venom drips onto Loki's face. When he shudders with the pain of this, the whole earth does shake. This is known as an earthquake. This will continue until Ragnarök, when Loki will get free and will take the side of the giants (Sturluson, 1954).



We see Loki in both aspects of the trickster, that of mischief-maker and that of the inimical anti-hero. His archetype is easily enough recognized in human form, manifesting in adolescent practical jokes or truly malevolent deeds.

There is a plethora of material concerning *Odin*. Although much insight into him has already been offered, still more is essential for understanding him. Odin has many hypostases or underlying essences that are reflected in his manifold names. Snorri (Sturluson, 1954) tells us that Odin is known as *All-father* because he is the father of all the gods, and *Valfather* because a moiety of those who fall in battle are his adopted sons, the other portion going to Freyja. His further hypostases as well as his high status are reflected in his more than fifty additional names which Snorri relates. These vary from Helmeted One, One-who-blinds-with-death, and Father-of-battle to Pleasant One, Very-wise One, and Grey-bearded One (p. 49). Additionally, some of the myths concerning Odin contain symbolism that is at once esoteric and hinting at great wisdom.



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Under the root of Yggdrasil that is found in Jötenheim, there is a spring that contains wisdom and understanding. This is the spring or well of Mímir. Mímir is very wise because, using the horn *Gjöll*, he drinks from this spring. When Odin came to Mímir to request a drink from the spring, he was granted this, but only when he gave up one of his eyes.

The Vanir, the older race of gods and goddesses, were mistrustful when the Æsir sent Mímir and Hoenir to them as pledges for the truce between the two races. The Vanir, interestingly, cut off Mímir's head and returned it. "Odin took the head, smeared it with such herbs that it could not rot, quoth spells over it and worked such charms that it talked with him and told him many hidden things" (Sturlason [sic], 1990, p. 3). Rather than drinking from Mímir's well, from then on Odin consulted directly with Mímir's talking head.



One interpretation of earlier part of this myth is that in order to attain insightful wisdom, one's vision must not focus too fully on the outer world. That is to say, one must look inwardly in order to find deeper meaning and understanding.

It should not be misunderstood, when revealed, that wine is his food and drink. Wine, of course, was an aristocratic drink, whereas beer was that of the common people. Perhaps it is his distinction that is underscored by the fact Odin requires no ordinary food. From his table, he offers this to his two wolves, *Geri* and *Freki*:

Battle-wont and famous,  
Odin war-glorious,  
sates Geri and Freki;  
the Father-of-armies  
himself lives always  
only on wine  
[Sturluson, 1954, p. 63].

Odin is often depicted with two ravens sitting on his shoulders. Their names are *Hugin* and *Munin*, Thought and Memory. The raven is the bird of the battlefield, to be sure, and for this reason alone it would not be surprising for Odin to have ravens on his shoulders. But, herein, we find additional and highly symbolic meaning:

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Over the world  
every day  
fly Hugin and Munin;  
I fear that Hugin  
will not come back,  
though I'm more concerned about Munin  
[Sturluson, 1954, p. 64].

First of all, Odin sends forth his ravens each morning to survey the nine worlds. They return to him, informing him of all they have witnessed. Only then, informed both by thought and memory is Odin prepared to act. This is Odin's first lesson to us: think and remember before acting.

Odin confesses his fear of losing either thought or memory. But, he reveals, he fears the loss of memory more. This suggests that the more conservative function of memory is of the greater importance in the constituting of guided intelligence. Second lesson: as important as thought is, memory is even more important in guiding one's actions. Or, otherwise stated, consult your memory of similar situations, considering what action led to what outcome before deciding on a course of action.

There may be a third lesson offered here, as well. In an earlier essay on the opposite tendencies of insight versus expression, I (Smith, 2011) wrote as follows:

At another level of interpretation, we can look to the birds themselves. They are ravens, seen in the Viking world as birds of the battle field. So, by virtue of the mental functions they stand for and the expressive activity they symbolize, they themselves are a metaphor for the bringing together of Insight and Expression.... The Norse mythology, in summary, appears to offer us a clue to the reconciliation of the polarity of Insight and Expression. To wit, action is best guided when informed by thought and memory. Action/Expression, being liberal (i.e., of Liber) benefits from the conservative influence of thought and memory/Insight. Memory, being the more conservative, may be the more important component of Insight [p. 274].

Another myth, and one in which Odin plays a solitary role, is fraught with both rich symbolism and arcane knowledge. This is the self-sacrifice of Odin, based on Hollander's (1962) translation of the "Hávamál in *The Poetic Edda*. It is sometimes referred to as "The Rune Poem."

I wot that I hung      on the wind-tossed tree  
                                 all of nights nine,  
wounded by spear,      bespoken to Óthin,  
                                 bespoken myself to myself,  
upon that tree      of which none telleth  
                                 from what roots it doth rise.

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Neither horn they upheld      nor handed me bread;  
I looked below me—  
aloud I cried—  
caught up the runes,      caught them up wailing,  
thence to the ground fell again [p. 36].

Mythologies often contain instruction in a sacred technology, instructions on how to create an altered state of consciousness. Such altered states of consciousness are tools for the enhancement of the experience of the underlying myth. This is especially true of the mythologies of shamanic societies. The Norse society had features that were shamanic, as was noted earlier, such as the three-level universe and the central Cosmic Tree. Odin's self-sacrifice is another, in this case an initiation that is consistent with shamanism. To bolster this is a footnote to the poem offered by Hollander. "In order to discover the runes, and through them to become possessed of secret wisdom, Óthin sacrificed himself by hanging himself on the World-Ash and wounding himself with his spear" (p. 36).

First, then, Odin hung (not hanged) himself on the sacred tree. This left him literally and psychologically ungrounded. In his *Psychology of Religion*, David Wulff (1991) reported that there are hints in the literature on witchcraft and possession as well as a pendulum-like platform found by anthropologists in Dutch Guiana which suggest suspension as a ritualistic way of bringing about an altered state of consciousness. Furthermore, Wulff summarized laboratory research by Jean Houston and Robert Masters with a device which they called their "cradle of creativity." Designed such that the person standing in the "free-swinging device will sway, rock, or twirl in response to the subject's slightest movements ... within 2 to 20 minutes, a trance state frequently ensues" (p. 190). Not brief was Odin's experience, but nine nights long.

Secondly, Odin wounded himself with his spear. Anyone who has experienced intense pain can attest to the mind-altering effect brought about by that. In addition, the long period of his hanging may suggest more than a little blood loss. This, too, could contribute to an altered state of consciousness.

Nine nights of dehydration and fasting are next mentioned. Both of these are known to create alterations in consciousness and are documented as such in religious rituals in many cultures. In the phrasing that is used, there is the additional suggestion of social isolation. A rather



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impressive professional literature exists, in addition to anecdotal accounts, documenting the mind altering effects of social isolation.

Through his sacrifice of himself, to himself, Odin obtained the runes. The difficulty of this ordeal is commensurate with the value of runes thus gained. The runes represent the arcane knowledge of the Norse, while at the same time give direct access to that knowledge. Image nine nights of hanging suspended, in pain, losing blood, socially isolated, having nothing to drink, nothing to eat! The extremity of this trial proves the worthiness of Odin to possess the knowledge of the runes. Having made the sacrifice, he did then give the gift of the runes to humankind.

Odin, the Very-wise One, certainly earned his wisdom. It came, in truth, from three sources. Earlier, we learned about his drinking from the Well of Mimir. Now, we have added his shamanic initiation into the runic mysteries. Yet to portray is how he came to drink of the mead of inspiration. Following Snorri (Sturluson, 1954), the tale unfolds as follows.



Having slain Kvasir, the dwarfs Fjalar and Galar, recall, produced the precious mead by mixing his blood with honey. Recall, too, that Suttung obtained the precious mead in exchange for the lives of these dwarfs. Suttung took the mead home and hid it, leaving his daughter, Gunnlöd, to guard it in the mountain, Hnitbjörg.

In his travels, Odin came upon nine serfs who were mowing hay with their scythes. When he volunteered to sharpen their scythes with his hone, the serfs gladly accepted his offer. When the serfs found how much better their sharpened tools cut the hay, they offered to buy Odin's hone. He agreed that for the price of a banquet someone could purchase it. All of them expressed such willingness, so Odin tossed the hone into the air. As the serfs scrambled to catch the hone, they managed to cut each other's throat with their scythes.

Continuing his journey, Odin came upon a giant named *Baugi*, brother of Suttung. Baugi reported that his nine serfs had been killed, and he was in need of laborers. Seeing an opportunity in this, Odin, using the name *Bölverk*, offered to do the work of nine men for the small price of a drink of the mead. Bölverk, working for the summer, fulfilled his part of the bargain. But, when he requested his wages, Baugi told him that Suttung jealously guarded the mead. Bölverk brought forth an auger named *Rati*, and asked Baugi to drill a

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hole into the mountain where the mead was guarded. Bölverk shapeshifted into a snake and crawled through the hole, in spite of Baugi's attempts to sabotage Bölverk's efforts by trying to stab him with the auger. Bölverk slept three nights with Gunnlöð, following which she promised Bölverk three drinks of the mead which was in her safekeeping. With each drink, he emptied one of the three containers which held the mead. Bölverk, then, shapeshifted into an eagle, and flew off toward Asgaard.

Seeing this, Suttung, too, shapeshifted into an eagle and took pursuit. When the Æsir saw Odin approaching, they set out crocks, and as he passed, he spat the mead into them. In his haste, however, Odin spilled some, that now being known as the poetasters' share. The Æsir did not bother with that, and anyone may partake of it. The supply, however, was Odin's gift to the Æsir and to the humans who can compose poetry.



Any discussion of Odin would be both incomplete and inadequate without inclusion of those sections of the "Hávamál," the longest of the Eddic poems, in which he set out moral principles and guidelines for social conduct. These are the "Sayings of Hár" ("The Sayings of the One-Eyed" or "The Sayings of the Exalted"), and cover no less than 137 stanzas (Hollander, 1962). They range from concrete and straight forward to abstract and enigmatic. For example, abbreviated to their core, compare "No mock make thou of any man" (p. 19) with "When ale thou drinkest, invoke earth strength" (p. 35). Between such clear advice and that which is more puzzling, there are other sayings such as "Too late by far to some feasts I came; to others, all too soon; the beer was drunk, or yet unbrewed: never hits it the hapless one right" (p. 24).

Hollander (1962), himself, summarized the content of these proverb-like or aphoristic verses, mentioning counsels on common situations such as laws of hospitality, decent conduct, moderation in eating and drinking, circumspection in dealing with strangers, establishing a good name, having one's own home, and a lengthy consideration of man-woman relationships. Although there are verses that reflect a cynical attitude and what Hollander called a "sternly realistic view of life" (p. 14), there is considerable unpretentious wisdom as well as clearly delineated ethical principles set forth. There is much here that would surprise anyone who holds only

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the popular image of the Viking as a ruthless warrior, barbaric and bent on raping and pillaging.

Douglas “Dag” Rossman shared with me his understanding of what he called “Drengskapur,” the heroic code of the Viking age. Based heavily on the “Hávamál,” he presented this as an addendum to *Nine Worlds*, his dictionary of Norse mythology (Rossman, 2000). Herein, he translated into simple terms the Odinic counsels that he had discerned:

Sannferdighet (“truthfulness”)—always be honest  
Hjelpsomhet (“helpfulness”)—aid those in need  
Trofasthet (“loyalty”)—be true to those who are true to you  
Sjalestyrke (“fortitude”)—hang in there when life gets tough  
Tapperhet (“courage”)—face your fears  
Selvrespekt (“self-respect”)—do nothing to harm your integrity or  
good name  
Selvbestemmelse (“self-determination”)—take charge of your own  
life  
Selvstyre (“self-restraint”)—control your behavior  
Selvstendighet (“self-reliance”)—don’t ask others to do for you  
what you can do for yourself

The goddesses whom Snorri (Sturluson, 1954) lists are more numerous, even, than the gods. Many of them have already been introduced, if only briefly. For some, the sacred literature offers only minimal information. Following is an accounting of each of them in the order chosen by Snorri.

Married to Odin and mother of Balder, *Frigg* is the foremost of the goddesses. Not surprisingly, her dwelling, known as *Fensalir*, is magnificent. Although she knows the fates of all men, she is silent on prophecies. During birth, women invoke her help. Her name in Old High German was *Frija*.

*Sága* lives at *Sökkvabekk*. It is here that she and Odin drink together each day from golden goblets. Rossman (2000), following the opinion of other scholars, has therefore suggested that *Sága* may be a nickname of *Frigg*.

*Eir* is renowned for being the best of all physicians.

Then, there is the virgin goddess, *Gefjon*. She is notable, as we have seen, for gathering those women to serve her who have died virgins. She shares with others the gift of prophecy. And yet, earlier we learned of her having four oxen sons by a giant, and giving her favors to King Gylfi in

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return for permission to plow up some of his land to form Zealand! Lindow (2001) called attention to the difficulty in reconciling these various accounts of Gefjon. “We are faced with a prostitute who is said to be a virgin goddess, and a goddess ... who is said to have had children with a giant, which should disqualify her as a goddess because the sexual traffic is all in the opposite direction” (p. 136). Rossman (2000), on the other hand, suggested that Gefjon is the virgin goddess, while the goddess with a proclivity for deep ploughing was another, one *Geffun*!

A virgin, too, is *Fulla*. She knows Frigg’s secrets, as well as serving her. An interesting detail about her is that she wears her hair loose and a golden band around her head. Also, that she carries Frigg’s trunk and takes care of her shoes.

*Freyja* is, of course, every bit as distinguished as Frigg. She is the only named goddess of the Vanir race. Her husband is *Od* and their daughter is *Hnoss*; Freyja’s brother, recall, is Frey. Hnoss is so comely that things that are beautiful or valuable are named after her, *hnoss*, meaning treasure in Old Norse. Freyja is of the Vanir race, and known as the divinity of the Vanir. Recall that when she rides into battle, she receives half of the slain and takes them to Fólkvangar, Field-of-warriors.

Freyja weeps tears of red gold while Od is away on his long journeys. Under cover of false names, *Mardöll*, *Hörn*, *Gefn* (Giver), or *Syr* (Sow), she has searched for Od. Most often, she drives a chariot drawn by two cats. Given such devotion, she is good to call upon for help in love affairs. She enjoys love poetry and in honor of her, wives of men of rank are addressed *Frú*. We have already come across her adventures with the concupiscent dwarfs and the necklace of the Brisings. This, of course, bespeaks her lustfulness, as well.

The Old Norse word for love is *sjafni*, for *Sjöfn* turns the thoughts to love, and this she does for both men and women. Some scholars believe she is another representation of Frigg.

*Lofn* is such a gentle and good goddess to invoke that she has been given consent by Odin and Frigg to bring together men and women whose marriage had been forbidden. Her name is the source of the Old Norse word for permission. Some scholars believe she is another representation of Frigg.

*Vár* takes notice of the vows made between men and women, and takes vengeance on those who break their vows. The Old Norse word for promises is *várar*.

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Nothing can be concealed from *Vör*, a goddess so wise and searching. Her name derives from *varr*, meaning aware in Old Norse.

*Syn*, *Denial*, is a goddess of two domains of activity. First, she watches over the door of the hall and closes it against anyone who should not enter. Secondly, it is said that “Syn is brought forward” as defense council when someone denies an accusation made against him or her (Sturluson, 1954, p. 60). So it is that she denies entry to those who should not enter the hall, and she denies accusations on behalf of those who claim no culpability for charges against them. Grimm (2012) identified her as a personification of truth and justice in protection of the accused.

When Frigg chooses to protect someone from danger, she appoints *Hlín* to shield them from harm. Rossman (2000) and others have suggested that *Hlín* is not a separate goddess, but another sobriquet of Frigg.

*Snotra* is known for her wisdom and for her gentle manner. Therefore, a self-controlled man or woman may be said to be *snotr*, or prudent.

*Gná* has a horse named *Hoof-flourisher* who, like Odin’s Sleipnir, can run through the air and over the sea. Given the remarkable steed that she rides, it is *Gná* whom Frigg sends on her errands. Perhaps of passing interest, *Hoof-flourisher* was out of *Skinny-sides* by *Breaker-of-fences*. Presumably from her riding in the air, that which soars high is called *towering*, after *Gná*’s name.

We have encountered *Sól* previously. Recall that it is *Sól*, sun personified, who is required to drive the chariot of the sun across the sky each day. Her brother is *Mani*, personification of moon.

*Bil* and her brother *Hjuki* follow *Mani* as he directs the course and the phases of the moon. *Mani* took them from earth as they were gathering water from the well *Byrgir* and placed them in the sky.

Among the goddesses, Snorri (Sturluson, 1954) includes several whose duty is to be sent into battle by Odin, first, to choose death for all that are destined to die, and second, to award victory. Called “half divine” by Grimm (2012), these are the *Valkyries*. Armed, they go forth, under shield and helmet. Thus, their epithets *skialdmeyjar* (shield-maids) and *hialmmeyjar* (helmet-maids). Grimm wrote that when the Valkyrie ride forth, they are usually nine in number. At the very core of “their being is an irresistible *longing* for this warlike occupation” (p. 421). Snorri singled out both *Gud* (Conflict) and *Rota* (p. 61), for as Grimm explained, they are “strictly val-choosers and mistresses of victory” (p. 421). Grimm reminded us that no destiny stirred the ancient spirit more than the issue

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of battles and wars. Furthermore, the hope of a Norseman to join the divine community after death is a pervasive element of their religion. If nothing else, these facts would establish for the Valkyries a prominent place in Norse mythology.

In addition to the two-fold duty stated above, the Valkyries have another duty, at once gentler and less dramatic, that being to carry the drink and serve at table in Valhalla. Their names are *Hrist*, *Mist*, *Skeggjöld*, *Skölgul*, *Hlid* (Battle), *Thrúd*, *Hlökk* (Din-of-battle), *Herfjötur* (Fetterer-of-an-army), *Göll*, *Geirahöd*, *Randgríd* (Shield-destroyer), *Rádgríd*, and *Reginleif*. Skuld is both a Valkyrie and the youngest of the *Norns*, but given that she is better known for her latter role, she will be discussed later. Not mentioned in this list is another most prominent Valkyrie we encountered earlier in the heroic tale of Sigurd the Dragonslayer, *Brynhild* (*Brunhild*, *Brunnhilde*). Many other Valkyries are mentioned throughout the Norse literature, as well.

Finally, in his list of goddesses, Snorri includes *Jörd* (Earth), mother of Thor, and *Rind*, mother of Váli. We acknowledged them as we discussed their sons.

*Idun* is not in Snorri's list, but was mentioned earlier as the wife of Bragi. Her role, however, is an important one. She has a box of apples for the gods. When they grow old, they need only eat of these apples to be young once more. This will continue until the time of Ragnarök.

## *Vanaheim*

Vanaheim is the second world of gods and goddesses, and Freyja is their leader. As we have seen, the Vanir who were sent to Asgaard as pledge of peace were the gods Njord and Frey, Freyja's father and brother, respectively. Vanaheim is older than Asgaard. More importantly, however, Vanaheim is the world of the fertility gods and goddesses. Their role is one of peace and well-being, nourishment and fecundity. As such, within the divine worlds, Vanaheim strikes a balance with Asgaard, the world of warrior gods and goddesses.

Reflecting this fertility theme, consider that Freyja and her brother Frey were begotten by Njord and his sister, Ingun. We know, too, of Freyja's dalliance with dwarfs in order to get the necklace of the Brisings. In the "Flyting of Loki" ("Lokasenna") of *The Poetic Edda*, Loki accused Freyja

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of having seduced many dwarfs, as well as many of the Æsir. In addition, Loki made a scathing, and at the same time quite revealing claim:

Hush thee, Freyja,      a whore thou art,  
                                 and ay wast bent on ill;  
in thy brother's bed      the blessed gods caught thee,  
                                 when, Freyja, thou didst fart  
[Hollander, 1962, p. 97]

Thomas DuBois (1999) summarized this proclivity quite succinctly, when he wrote that “the deities of the earth—the Vanir of Scandinavian texts—were on the whole a passionate, lascivious lot” (p. 54).

These instances of incest and lust surely underscore the fertility theme of the Vanir. “As the coital act emerged as a prime metaphor for the mystery of agricultural fecundity, the gods responsible for the season cycle, sunshine, rain, and plants took on the characteristics of human sexuality: gender, reproductive organs, and appetites” (DuBois, 1999, p. 54). Anthony Stevens (1999) identified Frey as the Norse representation of the archetypal god of male generative power. Leaving no question as to its meaning, a small bronze statue of Frey found in Sweden shows him ithyphallic (Ellis Davidson, 1996, p. 74).

DuBois (1999) extended his interpretations even further, invoking the concept of the *hieros gamos*, the divine or sacred marriage. The *hieros gamos* is the marriage of heaven and earth, often symbolized in the marriage of a god and a non-divine, which is necessary for the renewal of life-giving powers of the earth. For instance, we are already acquainted with the courtship of Frey and Gerd. Herein is the marriage of a fertility god to a bride who lives among the frost giants. “Freyr’s [Frey’s] eventual success signals the triumph of fertility over the frigidity of the giants, beings associated with winter, the mountains, and lifelessness” (p. 55). This theme is repeated in the marriage of the fertility god Njord and the mountain-dwelling giantess Skadi. As discussed by Stevens (1999), the incestuous relationship of Frey and Freyja also represents the *hieros gamos*. Perhaps, then, we can add to this the incestuous coupling of Frey and Freyja’s parents, Njord and his sister.

Think back to the earlier discussion of Freud’s final version of his instinct theory in which he contrasted the life instinct and the death instinct. Or, in more general terms, combining his earlier and later theories of instincts, sex and aggression. Vanaheim can be taken as a metaphor for the life instinct-cum-fertility, and Asgaard for the death instinct-cum-

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aggression. (Recall that in Freud's theory, aggression results when the death instinct is reversed in direction, that is, focused outward.) Thus, just as the warrior-protector, Thor, can be seen as an icon of Freudian aggression, Freyja merits the position of icon of sexuality.

Perhaps it would be good at this point to emphasize that the Vanir are led by a female deity, Freyja, while the Æsir are led by a male deity, Odin. Female and male are juxtaposed, as, correspondingly, are the fertility race and the warrior race. This female-male contrast is, interestingly, reflected in the types of magic associated with the Vanir and the Æsir. These are *seidr magic* and *galdr magic*, respectively.

For clarity of distinction between the two types of magic, let us consider *galdr* first. Odin is called the father of *galdr*, and it is most associated with him (Lindow, 2001). *Galdr* consists of magic charms or songs; Odin's mastery is described in the "Hávamál." The name, itself, appears to be derived from *gjalla*, which is Old Norse for *to yell*, or *to scream*. *Gala* means *to crow* in Icelandic, as does *gale* in Norwegian. Interestingly, there is a meter in Eddic poetry that is called *galdrar meter*, an extended form of song or chant meter (p. 133). *Galdr* was but one skill among Odin's many magical abilities. He could also shape-shift, control the weather, and consult with the dead. And, of course, he could use the runes.

"In Scandinavian mythology, [the] divinatory role becomes embodied in Freyja, who, Snorri notes, was the first among the gods to practice *seidr*, an art associated with the Vanir" (DuBois, 1999, p. 134). *Seidr* was for divination and for control of another person's will. This consists of ritual practices, shrouded in mystery. It is shamanic in form and involves trance states and the interaction of the practitioner with the spirits of others for the purpose of scrutinizing them or controlling them. As such, it can be used for evil purposes, as described in several sagas as well as in the *Edda* (DuBois, 1999).

Freyja taught *seidr* to Odin. Adding this form of magic to his skills was not without problem, however. Quoting Snorri, DuBois (1999) wrote:

Odinn (*sic*) was acquainted with that most powerful art known as *seidr*, and he therefore knew a person's fate and of the future, and also of how to cause people death, or bad luck, or illness, and also of how to take power or wit away from some people and give it to others. But in practicing this magic ... such shame and abomination ... occurred that it seemed unseemly for men to deal in it and thus the art was taught to priestesses [p. 136].



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The shame referred to is that *seidr* is secretive. Therefore, not only may one's opponent not know that he is being attacked, but he may have had his wit dulled so that he could not understand the attack even if he knew it was going on. Thus, any glory of fair and open combat would have been denied to both the attacked and the attacker. Such trickery was seen as unmanly.

### *Alfheim*

Of all of the nine worlds, we know the least about *Alfheim*, the third world of the upper level of the empyrean trilogy. It is, of course, the home of the elves or light elves, *liosálfar*. Although the light elves, *liosálfar*, are sometimes confounded with the dark elves, *svartálfar*, they are as diametrically opposed as their names imply. The light elves are light-colored or white. This coloration can be taken as symbolic of their purity, the antithesis of the dark elves or dwarfs both in color and character. Too, the elves are well-formed and symmetrical, in contrast to the ugly and misshapen bodies of the dwarfs.

In his philological research in the late nineteenth century, Grimm (1966) noted that “the Elder Edda several times couples the *aesir* and *álfar* together, as though they were a compendium of all higher beings.... This apparently concedes more of divinity to elves than to men. Sometimes ... as a third member, the *vanir*” (p. 443). Herein, the divinity of the elves is clearly established.

In a rare revelation, Grimm (1966) wrote, “The *Hrafnagaldur* opens with the words: *Alfödr orkar* (works), *álfar skilja*, *vanir vita*.” He then translated as follows. “Allfather, i.e., the *ás*, has power, *álfar* have skill (understanding), and *vanir* knowledge” (p. 443). All of the parentheticals and italics are his. These quotes not only group the *Æsir*, *Vanir*, and elves together as divine races, but disclose their particular fortes. In Old Norse and in Icelandic, *skilja* means *understand*. Together, the strong points of this divine triumvirate are most impressive. There is, however, some ambiguity as to their more precise meaning. The mythology, itself, leaves us with little beyond the security that the elves have understanding.

Perhaps there is slight clue as to the meaning of understanding on the part of the elves to be found in “The Lay of *Alvís*” or “*Alvísmál*” within

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*The Poetic Edda* (Hollander, 1962). Recall that in this myth, the dwarf, Alvis, has been promised Thor's daughter. In order to save her, Thor proposes that he will agree only if Alvis is able to recount the respective names of thirteen things used by the different races. In an unusual act of cleverness, Thor kept Alvis at this task until the sun rose, thus turning the dwarf to stone. In examining the terms offered by Alvis, something of the nature of elfish understanding may be revealed.

Grimm (1966) reminds us that, to use his terms, *álfar* (elves), *dverger* (dwarfs), *helbúar* (Hel-dwellers), men, giants, gods, *áses* (Æsir), and *vanir* are, according to the "Alvísmál," each a separate class of beings. Furthermore, each has a language of its own (p. 452). There are, however, some problems with analyzing their respective terms. With an uncharacteristic lack of determination, Hollander (1966) declared that "it is almost hopeless to assign consistently the six beings mentioned in each stanza to specific 'worlds'" (p. 110). Note that there are six in each stanza, but they are called by names that Grimm reckoned at eight. Furthermore, a juxtaposition and detailed comparison of the terms set forth for thirteen things by six or eight races would be lengthy and tedious. Setting aside such difficulties, though not denying that they do exist, let us consider the vocabulary of the elves. Fortunately, for us, there is no question or ambiguity concerning the placement of the elves. Herein are the names used by men and by the elves according to Hollander (pp. 112–116):

Earth	Burgeoning
Heaven	Fair Roof
Moon	Teller-of-Time
Sun	Fair Wheel
Clouds	Weather-Might
Wind	Din Farer
Calm	Day-Balm
Sea	Water
Fire	— —
Wood	Fair Bough
Night	Sleep's Ease
Barley	Grain
Ale	— —

Most noteworthy is the number of kennings that have a gentleness about them. Three times the term Fair is used, as well as the obvious Day-Balm

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and Sleep's Ease. Fire and Ale are given no term. Do they not exist in the language of the elves?

If this admittedly cursory analysis of the language of the elves is less than convincing, then a look at Larrington's (1996) translation may be more so. In her rendering of "All-wise's Sayings," the following kennings appear (pp. 110–113):

Earth	the growing one
Sky	the lovely roof
Moon	counter of years
Sun	the lovely wheel
Clouds	power-of-storms
Wind	din-journeyer
Calm	day-soother
Sea	<i>lagastaf</i>
Fire	—
Wood	lovely boughs
Night	joy-of-sleep
Barley	<i>lagastaf</i>
Ale	—

Of immediate interest is the fact that Larrington chose not to translate *lagastaf*, claiming in a footnote that the meaning of this twice-used word is unknown. However, Hollander did not suggest a kenning in these spots, either. Larrington chose translations that are perhaps even gentler than those of Hollander. Consider the use of lovely three times, and day-soother and joy-of-sleep.

Thus, the elves employ mild or gentle kennings for five out of thirteen items, and remain silent on two. So, five out of eleven. Two more terms considered unknown by Larrington, are translated with prosaic non-kennings by Hollander. So, five out of nine. No other class of being was shown to be so tender of language.

The upper worlds or heavens, taken as a whole, signify a higher consciousness than do the middle and lower worlds. Within this higher consciousness is that of warrior mien (*Æsir*), fertility mien (*Vanir*), and in the case of the light elves, mien that is at once somewhat enigmatic and perhaps highest of all. At their best, the *Æsir* bespeak courage, while with the *Vanir* it is peace, prosperity, and fecundity. When we look at specific gods and goddesses, we find further differentiation into particular aspects of

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consciousness. This allows us to go beyond nine worlds of consciousness and consider each individual god and goddess as a symbol of a particular, nuanced detail of consciousness.

Impressed with the extensive use of prosopopoeia, that is, personification, Grimm (1966) wrote that all of the “individual gods and godlike attributes really rest on the idea of an element, a luminary, a phenomenon of nature, a force and virtue, an art and skill, a blessing or calamity, which have obtained currency as objects of worship” (p. 881). Thus, the names of the goddesses Vár, Syn, and Snotra are etymologically connected with promises, denial, and prudent, respectively, as is Bragi with poetry (Sturluson, 1954). Best known, of course, is the connection between Thor and thunder. Seeing that the pagan gods and goddesses, as a whole, arose from such, Grimm noted that some of them attain higher rank and reputation by virtue of combining several attributes and by long-standing tradition. Odin comes to mind as an exemplar of this. In general, strong and vehement forces are related to gods, whereas milder and more gracious ones appertain to goddesses. This trend is blurred, however, by the side-by-side appearance of identical gods and goddesses who are either parent and child or brother and sister. Such is the case of Frey and Freyja.

The marriage of the gods and goddesses begs the question of why the particular pairings. Among these are the following, as we have earlier seen: Odin and Frigg; Thor and Sif; Loki and Sigyn; Balder and Nanna; Freyja and Od (in order of greater prominence); Bragi and Idun; Aegir and Rán, Njord and Skadi. The divine world is further complicated, of course, by the not infrequent dalliances of the gods and goddesses. Perhaps, of special interest is the sometimes marriage of a divine being and a giant.

Given their sometimes less than honorable behavior, perhaps the Norse gods and goddesses are not simply to be imitated. In fact, DuBois (1999) identified as a Christian view, based on the Hellenistic idea of discipleship, the expectation that gods are to be emulated. The Norse gods and goddesses are better regarded as symbols of particular styles of consciousness within the context of the nine worlds of consciousness. As such, they add considerable and detailed richness to that particular understanding. The elves, on the other hand, are perhaps worthy of modeling.

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### *Yggdrasil, Norns and Runes*

Thus far, we have considered as a cosmological metaphor of human consciousness the nine worlds of Norse mythology, and in the case of the middle and upper worlds, the sentient beings who inhabit these worlds. Doing so implies that a human being is in a sense an incarnation of those mythological beings as well as the worlds themselves. Each human being may be regarded as a revival of some of the qualities found in the mythological realms. These realms are “the coordinates which place the [myths] not in time or place of external reality, but in a state of mind” (Bettelheim, 1989, p. 62). And, to borrow a phrase from Bettelheim, these mythological locations “suggest a voyage into the interior of our mind” (p. 63). Taken together, the nine worlds form a gestalt of human consciousness. The term *gestalt* means a pattern or structure organized such that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. In order to appreciate more fully this gestalt of the nine worlds, we must perforce consider an additional aspect that is found at the contour where philosophy and psychology meet. This aspect or context is one that is revealed through close examination of Yggdrasil, the Norns, and the Runes.

Yggdrasil, as discussed earlier, is the axis mundi, the Cosmic Axis, the World Pillar, the Cosmic Tree. As such, it is an archetype found throughout shamanic societies. As noted earlier, the Norse culture was not shamanic, per se, but did contain some shamanic features. Furthermore, the archetypal three-level universe connected by the Cosmic Axis forms a gestalt. The criteria for a gestalt, first articulated by Ehrenfels in 1890, are *superordination* and *transposibility*. The first criterion is that the arrangement of the elements of the thing in question is perceived as a whole; a perceptual figure of a higher order emerges in which that figure

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is more than the sum of the parts that constitute it. The second criterion, transposibility, means that the wholistic figure can be recognized in its varying manifestations; its form persists across presentations. A simple example will make these things clear. A melody may emerge from a particular arrangement of musical notes—superordination. That melody may be recognized in alternate musical keys, with differing tempos, and at various volumes—transposibility (Smith, 1997). Thus, the empyrean trilogy with its central axis is both an archetype and a gestalt. This gestalt with its nine-world, Norse inflection is readily recognized in the many drawings depicting it throughout the literature pertaining to Norse mythology.

More poetically, in Norse mythology the central axis is specifically the World Tree. It is an ash, and the best and greatest of all trees, we are told by none other than Odin, himself. Honey-dew falls to the earth from Yggdrasil, and honey bees feed on it. Thus, it is nurturing, and sweet in its nature.

Serving as the nexus of the nine worlds, it is Yggdrasil that lends unity to the universe, thus allowing the formation of a gestalt. Nine worlds, connected on three levels by a cosmic tree. This gestalt is one of multiplex, organic unity. There are two important implications in this. First, the cosmos is a living thing and therefore, subject to a life cycle. An arising, a being, and a passing away are implied. Already, we have considered the origin of the cosmos, looked to some of the stories of its being, and touched on the end of the cycle, Ragnarök. The second implication is that, given the nature of a gestalt, a change in any one element has a ripple effect on the entire structure. One event can potentially set in motion a catenation of events moving across time and cosmography. Recall the ripples sent out by Loki's throwing a stone at Otter! So extensive were these undulations that they extended from myth to saga to medieval history, from Loki to Sigurd to Attila the Hun (Atli)!

We have seen, too, that *The Poetry Edda* and Snorri's *Prose Edda* diverge in their accounts of where the three roots of Yggdrasil lie. The former claims in Midgaard, Jötenheim, and Hel, while the latter states they are in Asgaard, Jötenheim, and Niflheim. The main question this leaves is whether there is a root in the upper world. Lindow (2001) suggests that Snorri extended the unifying principle of Yggdrasil by making it tower over the sky. He did so by moving the root in question from what is more nearly the world of humans (roots among humans, giants, and the dead) to a more mythological plane (roots among the gods, giants and the under-

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world). More important, however, than the locations of the roots, per se, are the springs or wells found under each root. According to Snorri (1954), the *spring of Mimir* lies under the root in Jötenheim. Recall Odin's sacrificing an eye to drink from this well of wisdom. *Hvergelmir* is the name of the well under the root in Niflheim. There is suggestion that it is here that the dragon *Nidhögg* dwells, chewing on the root of Yggdrasil. It is only if we maintain a root in Midgaard, and not in Asgaard as the location for the sacred *Spring of Urd* that it makes sense for the gods to cross Bifröst in order to go there. Each day, we are told, they ride over the bridge to the Spring of Urd, save Thor, who walks there, wading through rivers in his path. There, at the *Spring of Destiny*, they hold their court of justice. There are two birds that are nourished in the Spring of Urd, called swans. We are told in the mythology that all swans have come from these two.

The swan subsequently played an important role in Germanic literature. In the eponymous medieval legend, *Lohengrin*, this Germanic Grail Knight and son of Parzival arrived to rescue a princess while standing on a small barge pulled by a white swan. This legend was the basis for Wagner's romantic opera of the same name. The mid-nineteenth century king of Bavaria, Ludwig II, was known as the Swan King. He built *Schloss Neuschwanstein* (Castle New-Swan-Stone or -Jewel) which became the model for the famous fairy-tale castles found in the Disney theme parks. On the walls of *Schloss Neuschwanstein* are painted impressive scenes from Wagnarian operas, including *Lohengrin*. All of these things can be recognized as echoes of Norse mythology.

Before leaving Yggdrasil, it is important to add several additional details. Yggdrasil is beset by more than just Nidhögg. There are many other serpents eating upon it with names among them that translate as Living-deep-in-earth, Dweller-on-a-moor, and Grave-wolf's sons, Greyback, and Field-burrower. Furthermore, four harts, *Dáin*, *Dvalin*, *Duneyr*, and *Durathrór*, leap about the branches, eating the shoots. These ongoing events are a reminder of the ineluctable cycle of arising, being, and passing away. Otherwise stated, these events foreshadow Ragnarök, when one cycle ends and another begins.

There is a knowledgeable eagle in the branches of Yggdrasil. Curiously, a hawk named *Vedrfölnir* or Weather-bleached One sits between the eagle's eyes. Curiously, too, a squirrel with the name *Ratatosk* (Gnaw-tooth) runs up and down Yggdrasil carrying messages of abuse between the eagle and Nidhögg. The presence of the knowledgeable eagle, usually

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depicted high in the tree, in contrast to the the relative unconsciousness of the nether worlds, may further symbolize levels of consciousness on the vertical axis, that is, the trunk of Yggdrasil. The abusive messages carried by Ratatosk mirror the contest of insults between Loki and several gods and goddesses found in “Lokasenna” or “The Flyting of Loki.”

Of particular fascination are the Norns, of which there are many. Of different origins, some of these maidens come from Æsir-kin, some from the elves, and some from the dwarfs. Importantly, the Norns draw close to children when they are born and shape their lives. Good Norns, coming from good stock, appoint favorable destinies with long life, wealth, and fame. Other Norns, however, reflecting their ancestry, appoint lives of misfortune. This is to say, the Norns decide the fates of men.

Of special importance are *Urd*, *Verdandi*, and *Skuld*. Living near the Spring of Urd, these Norns draw water from the spring and mix it with the clay found thereabout. Due to the sacredness of this water, the clay mixture is turned to white and is possessed of special power. These three Norns apply this wet, white clay to Yggdrasil each day in order to offset wither and decay. Although the cycle of arising, being, passing away is inexorable, the final phase is thus restrained by the restorative effect of the white clay. That is to say, the rate of the decline of Yggdrasil, and thus the move to the end of a cosmic cycle with Ragnarök, is thereby in part paced by the Norns. This activity, alone, establishes the Norns as agents of the cycle that governs the Norse world of myth.

The relationship between the Norns, Urd, Verdandi, and Skuld, and destiny is both complex and highly intriguing. We do well to turn to Grimm (2012), a master philologist, to open ourselves to an etymological understanding of this relationship. First of all, “the term *norn* ... has not been discovered hitherto in any other dialect, though undoubtedly it belongs to a genuine Teutonic root ... but even Swedish and Danish know it to longer” (p. 405). Grimm published this in 1882. He continued, informing us that *Urdr* (Urd) comes from a root which is a past form for *to become*. Verdandi is a present form coming from the same root. Finally, Skuld derives from an auxiliary verb by which the future tense is formed, in English, *shall*. “Hence we have what was, what is, and what shall be, or the past, present and future, very aptly designated,” and a Norn presiding over each one (p. 405). But, given that the well beside Yggdrasil is named after Urd, it seems she must have been of greatest consequence of the three. That is to say, the past is in some sense of greater significance than



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either the present or the future. Put less prosaically, what was is of greater consequence in the mythic mind than what is or what shall be.

The three virgins, Urd, Verdandi, and Skuld, visit each child at birth and utter its doom, its destiny. "Destiny itself is called *orlog* ... the norns have to manage it, espy it, decree it, pronounce it" (Grimm, 2012, p. 410). They allot to all their term of life. Not surprisingly, the Norns are associated with weaving; spinning the threads of fate is, indeed, an apt image. As if by weaving, the Norse myths witness changing and interrelating of events and the placing of layer upon layer as the tales unfold. We might say that what the sword (or hammer) is to the warriors, the distaff is to the Norns.

Turning once again to Grimm (2012), we learn that the word *Urdr* is etymologically connected with the word *wyrd*. This is fate. "She is painted powerful, but often cruel and warlike" (p. 406). Grimm seems to bemoan the passing of this old and simple word with the coming of Christianity and its banishing of pagan notions. English and Scotch dialects, however, held on to it longer as evidenced by the reference to the *weird-sisters* in *Macbeth*. Picking up on the etymological connection between the Old Norse *Urdhr* and *wyrd*, Edred Thorsson (1988a) titled one of his books, *At the Well of Wyrd*. In it, he defined *wyrd* as "the process in which past actions ... work through time to affect present experience" (p. 122). Keep this definition in mind. Put very simply, actions have later consequences, and *wyrd* refers to the process by which this happens.

In his well-researched text, *The Well and the Tree*, Paul Bauschatz (1982) has suggested a more esoteric meaning for the names of the Norns, particularly that of Skuld. In this, he differs with Grimm and with Joseph Campbell, who is in agreement with Grimm in seeing *wyrd* in the traditional relation of past, present, and future. Conceding that the idea of future time may seem implied by the root from which Skuld is derived, Bauschatz argues that its meaning is more closely found in notions of constraint, obligation, or necessary continual action. The word "carries a far greater force of obligation or necessity; 'what *shall* be' in Old Norse is 'what is, of necessity'" (p. 12). Consistent with the Bauschatz interpretation, Davidson (1964, 1996) glossed Skuld as *Necessity*.

Closely related to the process of *wyrd* is the concept of *orlog* (*ørlog*), as implied earlier. Since the Well of Urd was the place where the Æsir held their court of justice, their activities there and those of the Norns, Urd, Verdandi, and Skuld, would predictably be related. And, indeed, "the

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Norns are said 'to make laws' (*log leggja*), 'to choose life' (*lif kjósa*) for the sons of men, and 'to set or mark fate' (*ørlog segja*)" (Bauschatz, 1982, p. 6). Bauschatz clarified that although *log leggja* is the usual Old Norse term for making laws, there is a more revealing literal meaning. "*Leggja* is 'to lay,' 'to place' ... *Log* (the plural of *lag*) is literally 'strata' or 'that which has been deposited or laid down'" (p. 6). The prefix *ør-* means something of primary significance, something beyond the ordinary. Therefore, *ørlog* means primal, earliest, or highest law. We could say it is the most significant things that have been laid down. "To speak the *ørlog* is, then, to take account of all that happens with respect to all that has happened already" (p.7).

In summary, Urd symbolizes actions come to fruition, all that has already become; Verdandi symbolizes the occurring process, that which is in the process of becoming; Skuld is involved with necessary action, actions obliged, the necessity of becoming. Simply put, the three Norns respectively symbolize actions that have occurred, actions that are occurring, and actions that of necessity must occur. There is a Norwegian saying, which in translation is, "That which happens, must happen."

These ideas can be placed in the larger context of the relationship of the three wells from which the roots of Yggdrasil draw their water. To begin, consider that the Well of Urd is the well of the past, Mimir's Well is the well of wisdom, and Hvergelmir is the well where the dragon Nidhogg dwells, chewing on the root of Yggdrasil. Bauschatz (1982) was mindful that wells suggest fluidity, accumulation, and containment. The symbolism of relationship of these three wells, however, may go quite beyond this. He opined that "what their juncture uniquely signals ... is a meaningful joining of 'wisdom' with a 'past' that, although exhibiting something of 'containment,' still 'writhes' like a serpent and 'seethes'" (p. xix). This heady interpretation is surely worthy of contemplation.

To reiterate, Urd is the Norn of the past. And she is the most important of the Norns. Connecting these two facts provides a vital clue to the conception of time in the Norse world. Bauschatz (1982) stated in the Forward of his *The Well and the Tree* that "Germanic culture was dominated by its conception of its own past" (p. ix). Consider his bald statement for a moment. He accepted as an "obvious fact" this domination by the past. Sounding paradoxical, at first, Bauschatz (1982) stated that "*Wyrd* (and the Norns) governs the working out of the past into the present (or, more accurately, the working *in* of the present *into* the past" (p. 11). This is to

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say, the past is, in a sense, the collector of events. It is constantly growing as it pulls events into itself. Thereby, the past is laid down and realized, whereas the present is in flux.

The fact, as opined by Bauschatz (1982) concerning the Germanic domination by the past, is consistent with another fact, that Germanic languages have evolved a binary system of tenses for verbs. That is, in Germanic languages there is a past tense and there is a present tense as reflected in verb endings. There is, however, no true future tense. This becomes clear if one speaks, for instance, a romance language. In French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish, there are verb endings that indicate future tense. Take the example of the French verb *parler* (to speak), a first conjugation or –er verb (as opposed to second and third conjugation verbs in which –ir and –re are the respective infinitive endings). The first person singular conjugates as follows: *Je parlai* (I spoke), *Je parle* (I speak), *Je parlerai* (I shall speak).

Not so, however, in Danish, Icelandic, Norwegian, or Swedish. In order to speak of the future in these languages, one must use an auxiliary verb. In a parallel Norwegian example, we have in the case of the infinitive *snakke* (to speak): *Jeg snakket* (I spoke), and *Jeg snakker* (I speak). But to refer to the future, I would say *Jeg skal snakke* (I shall speak). And true to our Germanic language roots, in English we usually use shall or will in order to help the verb into the future. That shall or will is often given conversational tone by contracting it into I'll, we'll, you'll, he'll, she'll, they'll, or even it'll. Alternatively, of course, we sometimes when speaking informally use the present tense (or present participle) to speak of the future, giving the utterance a sense of certainty. Thus, one may say, "I speak at the meeting tomorrow" (or "I am speaking at the meeting tomorrow."). The true future tense is, in any case, absent. When using an auxiliary verb plus the infinitive form of a verb to indicate future time, there is no designation of person (first person, second person, third person) or of number (singular, plural). With the exception of switching shall and will for emphatic emphasis, both the auxiliary verb and the infinitive remain constant across person and across number. The above mentioned designations of person and number are, of course, criteria for true verbal forms. And this binary system of verb tenses lends support for the assertion concerning the dominance of the past in the Norse world. At the same time, it maintains the two-part division of time into the past and the non-past.

The Christian world, on the other hand, has long held to a tripartite

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view of time. This view can be traced even earlier to the time of the ancient Greeks. In his *Physics*, Aristotle rejected the following argument. Time is composed of past and future. Since the past no longer exists, and the future does not yet exist, then time does not exist. He concluded that time is motion that admits of numeration, that is, time can be measured (Russell, 1945). The point is, however, that Aristotle appears to take the past and the future as givens. The Christian view of time evolved largely from the writings of St. Augustine, namely the *Confessions* and *The City of God*. Therein, he stated the tripartite nature of time as created by God, with a past, a present, and a future. This is perhaps oversimplified, and Augustine's writing about time contains contradictions, but clearly he dealt with tripartite time.

The Christian view, as understood by Bauschatz (1982), differs from the Norse in that it involves permanence whereas the latter view is one of transience. The former speaks of eternity. St. Augustine explicitly took the position that God is eternal. There is also eternal damnation for the wicked, and so forth. The Norse myths suggest recurrent cycles of arising, being, and passing away. In addition, Bauschatz wrote that "the Christian universe is fixed and closed, that of the early Germanic peoples seems to be open and in flux" (p. xii).

We have considered the Norns, Urd, Verdandi, and Skuld, as they embody the principle of *ørlog* with its attendant process of *wyrd*. Nietzsche (no year) echoed the Norns in his "Apophthegms and Interludes," Number 179. "The consequences of our actions seize us by the forelock, very indifferent to the fact that we have meanwhile 'reformed'" (p. 92). Although regarded from its more negative aspect, Nietzsche has herein captured the essence. We can now expand our discourse to include the runes.

As difficult as *ørlog* and *wyrd* are to comprehend, the runes are equally so. We would do well, first of all, to distinguish two uses of the ancient runes. On the one hand, they were used for writing, particularly for inscribing memorials or objects of value and for keeping records of commercial exchange. On the other hand, they were of importance in magical practices of the Norse. This latter usage, alas, has led some writers to regard the runes as literally magical. Others have taken them as objects of play. When used either to predict the future or as a parlor game, they are being misunderstood, at the very least. Beyond such superstition and trivialization, such uses overlook the great impact that the introduction of writing had for the Norse, and surely profane the sacred place the runes

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occupied in their mythic-cum-religious world. They represent, in a sense, the mysteries of that world and are keys to understanding it on a deep and more esoteric level.

First, let us look at the use of runes as a script. Although most of the surviving runic inscriptions are medieval, the history of the runes goes back to the period of Imperial Rome. The British Museum Press published a scholarly treatise on the runes written by R.I. Page (1987) and titled simply *Runes*. Therein, based on archeological finds, Page dated the runes back to near the beginning of the Christian era, the second century CE. Where the runes were invented is a question that has spawned several theories, including eastern Europe near the Roman Empire and including Rumania, central Germany, and even western Russia; the Alpine valleys of southern Switzerland and northern Italy; and Denmark. Of course, except for the Roman Empire, these are the modern names for these geographical areas. At any rate, the exact location for the origin of the runes is debated. It is believed that several of the early Germanic nations did have their own mode of writing with distinctive runic alphabets. These nations include the so-called barbarian tribes all of whom spoke Germanic languages, the Angles, Franks, Frisians, Goths, Jutes, Lombards, Saxons, Scandinavians, Teutons, and Vandals. Furthermore, Page opined that all of these peoples speaking Germanic languages had some degree of shared racial identity.

Although runic inscriptions have been discovered on wood, stone, metal, and bone, the runic forms were designed, according to Page (1987), for inscribing on wood. Because of this use of wood, the earliest runes were designed for ease of incising on such material. A rune consisted of vertical strokes at right angles to the wood grain, and slanted strokes that would stand distinctly from the grain. At the same time, horizontal strokes, which would be hard to distinguish from the grain, were avoided. Curves, too, were eschewed in the carving of the earliest runes. Even within these, so to speak, restrictions, there were variations in the rune forms, even in very early examples. And, some of the runes show influence from the Roman or Latin alphabet, according to Page.

The runic alphabet is more properly called the *futhark*. Just as the word *alphabet* is derived from the names of the first two letters of the Greek, alpha and beta, futhark is formed from the first six runes of the rune set. These are *fehu*, *uruz*, *thurisaz*, *ansuz*, *raidho*, *kenaz*. Note that the third rune has the phonetic value of *th*; thus, we have but six runes

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forming futhark. As we shall see, there are several rune sets or futharks, perhaps half a dozen or more. And, given that they were used in widespread areas over hundreds of years, speaking variations of Germanic languages, it should be no surprise that the names of the individual runes have their variants. These variations are in evidence among the earliest futharks dating from the fifth century. In addition, for simplicity, some authors have anglicized the spellings. The spellings used above are those presented by Edred Thorsson (1989) in *Rune Might* in his presentation of the older 24-rune Elder Futhark. (p. 34).

Not only does each rune have a name, and that name begin with a sound that defines the phonetic value of that rune, but each name is a meaningful word. For example, in the Older Futhark the first rune is named fehu, its phonetic value is the sound f, and it means money, cattle, wealth. Interestingly, a rune was sometimes used not only to express its phonetic value, but to stand for the meaning of its name. This is a sort of abbreviation. For instance, fehu could be inscribed to convey the meaning *cattle*.

There are ninth-century manuscripts from Anglo-Saxon England and its territories that have drawings of runic characters and their local names. These runes are believed to be much older, of course, but not written about until this time. These sources have been invaluable in defining the Elder Futhark of 24 runes (Page, 1987).

In addition to the multiple futharks with their variations on and differing numbers of runes, there are other difficulties in reading runic writing. Obviously, there is the challenge of differing languages within the Germanic family of languages and the several dialects that each language has. But there are mechanical difficulties as well. Sometimes the inscriptions read left to right, sometimes right to left, or even boustrophedon, that is, left to right and right to left on alternate lines, like ploughing a field. When an inscription is circular, as is sometimes found on memorial rune stones and on jewelry, where does it begin? Sometimes a rune is reversed, and sometimes inverted. Words may run together, and lack of punctuation results sometimes in run-on sentences. Sometimes a runic text does not reflect that a letter is repeated, either in the spelling of a word or when a sentence ends and the next begins with the same letter. This is true sometimes with double consonants. Also, two, three, or even more runes can be combined. That is to say, the several runes can be ligatured, forming a *bind-rune*. If all of this were not enough, there are even

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more difficulties of a highly technical sort that are dealt with by Page (1987).

There is no standard futhark, as such, but there are a few that are most widely known. Already mentioned is the 24-rune Elder Futhark. By 500 CE, the runes could be found in Denmark, England, Norway, and Sweden, and parts of Germany, Hungary, Poland and, Russia. The Elder Futhark evolved into several early forms. One of these early forms found in Sweden, known as the futhark of Vadstena, had pairs of dots which divided the 24 runes into sets of 8. It is now common for some writers to present the Elder Futhark in three rows of eight runes. In Scandinavia, the Elder Futhark continued to be used until about 700 CE, just before the Viking Age. A closely related futhark was used in more southerly regions in Germania. In England, an Anglo-Saxon Futhark evolved with the addition of runes bringing it to 31. A similar development in Frisia (west Germany) led to what has become known in some books as an Anglo-Frisian Futhark of 33 runes (Thorsson, 1989).

While this expansion of futharks was taking place in western Germany and in England, the opposite was occurring in Scandinavia. By the seventh century, there is evidence of simplification of some runes and even the discarding of some. By the ninth century, the Younger Futhark had emerged, reduced in size and with reshaped forms. This is the 16-rune futhark that was in use in the Scandinavian world during the Viking Age, and in some areas for even some time thereafter. There are two major variations of the Younger Futhark, the Danish or common runes and the somewhat simpler Swedo-Norwegian or short-twig runes. Page (1987) pointed out, however, that these geographical designations are misleading, for the two variations of the futhark were not well kept apart and sometimes inscriptions consisted of an integration of the two.

The Norse names and meanings for the runes are preserved from a bit later time than those manuscripts that identified the names and meanings of the runes of the Elder Futhark. The runic names in the Younger Futhark correspond fairly well with the respective runes in the Elder Futhark. There are, however, exceptions. Rarely, the meanings are quite different. For instance, the second rune or uruz in the Elder Futhark and úr in the Younger Futhark, means auroch (a now extinct wild ox) in the former and drizzling rain in the latter.

There are several thousand extant runic inscriptions from the pre-Viking and Viking times. These are found on jewelry and weapons, as well



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as on coins and in commercial records, but surely the most impressive examples are those found on rune stones. The rune stones are monuments placed at ancient cross-roads or other prominent positions to commemorate the life of chieftains or warriors. Or they were to mark territory or declare an inheritance. Sometimes the runes are carved on large stones already in place or even on bedrock. While the majority of the rune stones are in Sweden, an impressive number are in Norway and Denmark, and some on the Isle of Man. Traveling Norsemen left their inscriptions, too, in Iceland, on the Orkney Islands, the Shetland Islands, and in Ireland. Rune stones can be viewed both in the Scandinavian countryside and in many museums.

By the eleventh century, runes had been superseded by the Latin alphabet in England, even earlier in Germany. However, the runes lived on in Scandinavia and its colonies, well into the middle ages (Page, 1987).

With the advent of the runes in the world of the Norse, spoken sounds could be represented by marks carved upon a stave. Handed to another, those stave marks could be translated back into those same spoken sounds. Spoken words made visible as runic forms, visible runic forms become spoken. Surely a magical process! But, there is more magic, still, to be found in the mythopoetic world of the Norse, and in the runes.

Odin's sacrifice, shamanic initiation into the wisdom of the runes, hard won with fasting and thirst, spear-wounded, isolated and left hanging all of nights nine on that Tree that connects all and marks the end and the beginning. Then, "aloud I cried—caught up the runes, caught them up wailing" (Hollander, 1962, p. 36). Odin's gift to mankind.

From a word to a word  
I was led to a word  
From a deed to another deed.

So ends this translation of Odin's initiation in "The Speech of the High One," which follows the Preface in Ralph Blum's (1987) *The Book of the Runes*. This is part of Odin's longer speech, known also as the "Rune Poem," from the *Poetic Edda*.

Odin continued, telling of the runes he had learned to score and to chant (Hollander, 1962; Larrington, 1996):

One is for help in case of sorrow, care, and sickness;  
A second needed by those who would be healers;  
A third to fetter my foe and dull his sword;  
A fourth to break my bonds, if fettered;



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A fifth to stop a spear flying toward me if seen by my eyes;  
A sixth, if a foe has tried to wound me with runes, the wound will be upon him;  
A seventh to stanch the fire set upon the hall by enemies;  
An eighth to bring settlement where there is hatred;  
A ninth to calm the wind and the waves, to soothe the sea;  
A tenth to scatter night-hags that I see sporting in the sky, scaring them out of their skin, forgetting their forms and their homes;  
An eleventh to keep safe loyal friends that I lead into battle;  
A twelfth to revive a hanged man and seek his counsel;  
A thirteenth that if I pour water over a young warrior he will not fall in battle;  
A fourteenth to know the Æsir and the elves;  
A fifteenth for strength to the Æsir, victory to the alfs, and insight;  
A sixteenth to turn a maid's thoughts to me and allow me to work my will with her;  
A seventeenth to keep the love of a maid and prevent her from leaving me for another;  
An eighteenth which to none I will tell ... except to the one in whose arms I lie ... or to my sister!

Odin closed his "Hávamál" of *The Poetic Edda* with a statement of conditions for the runes (Hollander, 1962, p. 41):

Of help to the sons of men,  
of harm to the sons of etins;  
hail to whoever spoke them,      hail to whoever knows them!  
Gain they who grasp them,  
happy they who heed them!

Unfortunately, we know neither the graphic forms of these runes nor their names, and, it follows, not the meanings of their names. Of course, the eighteenth rune has led to much conjecture. Hollander (1962), for instance, has suggested that it may be the same as the secret that Odin whispered in the ear of his dead son, Balder. And, the set of runes presented by Blum (1987) for use as an oracle, consists of the Elder Futhark plus a blank rune piece to represent Odin's eighteenth rune.

In "Sigdrífumál" ("The Lay of Sigdrífa") of *The Poetic Edda* (Hollander, 1962), there is another list of runes. Herein we find:

Victory runes to be scored on one's sword hilt and guard, following which Tyr is to be called upon twice;  
Ale runes to be scratched on one's ale horn and on the back of the hand, and the Nauth Rune (the eighth or need rune of the Younger Futhark) on one's fingernails.  
This is to be used if another man's wife betrays one after being trusted;  
Help runes drawn on one's palms for helping a woman deliver her baby as her wrists are held;  
Sea runes scratched on the boat's bow and rudder blade and etched with fire on the oars to keep one safe at sea;  
Limb runes scratched on boughs that bend to the east if one wants to be a healer;

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Speech runes to use if someone tries to harm one while speaking at the Thing (assembly);

Mind runes for wisdom.

In addition to these runes, we are told that to counteract possible magic or poison in one's cup, a leek should be cast into it. This advice followed the ale runes.

Once more, and with the exception of the Nauth Rune, we are left in the dark as to the graphic forms of these runes or further information as to their nature.

It seems, then, that the runes could be cut or scratched into objects, or they could be spoken, sung, chanted. In addition to being cut or chanted, the myths speak of their being made into elixirs. Based on Eddic sources, this is discussed by DuBois (1999) in his *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*. In "Sigrdrífumál," the Valkyrie Sigrdrifa listed, as we just saw, a number of magical runes that she knew. She went on to mention places where such runes may have been placed, some of which are rather surprising. These include on Sleipnir's teeth (recall, this is Odin's horse), a bear's paw, Bragi's tongue (god of poetry), the claw of a wolf, an eagle's beak, the head of a bridge, a midwife's hand, on glass, on gold, on good-luck charms, Gungnir's point (Odin's spear), a night-owl's beak, and the nail of a Norn. If these are scraped off into mead, a powerful elixir is created.

If these are the ways that the figures of myth used the magical runes, the question arises as to how humankind did so. Insight into this is afforded, at least by inference, by the writing of the Roman historian Tacitus. In his *Germania*, he described the Germanic tribes in some detail. In this work, he explained a method used by these early Germans to cast lots in order to obtain auspices.

They cut off a branch of a nut-bearing tree and slice it into strips; these they mark with different signs and throw them completely at random onto a white cloth. Then the priest ... or the father of the family ... offers a prayer to the gods, and looking up at the sky picks up three strips, one at a time, and reads their meaning from the signs previously scored on them [Mattingly quoted in Bauschatz, 1982, p. 68].

This was written before the runes were in wide use, but such scoring of strips of wood suggests a pre-runic activity of a related type. Furthermore, such scoring on pieces of wood was an activity of the Norns as told in the "Voluspá" (The Prophecy of the Seeress) in *The Poetic Edda*. There it is written, "they scores did cut" (Hollander, 1962, p. 4). Furthermore, there

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is archeological evidence that pre-runic and runic symbols were sometimes used together. It seems, then, a safe and reasonable extrapolation that the procedure described by Tacitus was extant during the time of the Vikings.

We know with certainty that the runes were not just a writing system, as awesome as that, in itself, probably was for those early initiates. In *The Well and the Tree*, Bauschatz (1982) asseverates that the runes “originally represented symbolically some fixed and realized aspects of the forces that structure the universe” (p. 68). In a footnote (p. 209), he leaves open the question of whether the runes reflect a systematized working out of a complete and unified structure of the Norse cosmos, or something more limited. Whether scored on the hilt of a sword, sung by a seeress, or cast on a cloth, the runes were sacred and holding of both mystery and might.

There have been a number of runic revivals in modern times, periods of renewed interest in the use of runes for purportedly oracular or occult purpose. One such notable revival took place in Germany during the early twentieth century in what has been called the Germanic occult renaissance. Its high priest was Guido von List. During a several month period of near-blindness following an eye operation, the runes are said to have “revealed themselves” to him. This led to a greater expression of the interest in occultism that he had held for some time. He originated his 18-rune set, known as the Armanic Futhork (*sic*), based on Odin’s list in the “Hávamál” of *The Poetic Edda* and on a modified Elder Futhark. His runes became the cornerstone of his work which eventually filled more than ten volumes. In 1908, he published *The Secret of the Runes* as an introduction to his ideas (Von List, 1988). He died in 1919, just following World War I and the defeat of Germany. His work and others around him brought the runes to the attention of a great many people, and at the same time spawned controversy that was destined to resonate politically for many years to come (Thorsson, 1989).

If we consider the number of books published as an index of popular interest, then there appears to have been an upsurge of interest in the occult or divinatory use of the runes during the late 1980s and going forth. A plethora of such books appeared during this period, many of which have been reprinted. They vary from apparently well-researched and serious books to fanciful New Age creations. At the latter extreme, some of these books are a hodgepodge of ideas freely taken from various Eastern and Western (including Native American) spiritual or occult traditions,

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couched in New Age patois, then tied to the runes in an idiosyncratic manner. Therefore, when entering this popular market, *caveat emptor* is in order.

For the “tough minded,” to borrow from William James’s distinction, the runes are primarily of historical interest, letter forms that allowed a pre-literate people to begin writing and transition to a more narrative writing with the Latin alphabet. They are important archaeologically for the information that they supply. There is record of magical use, but we know very little of that, beyond mention in the myths and sagas. For the “tender minded,” on the other hand, the mystical aspect of the runes is equal in importance to that of the linguistic aspect, if not greater. One can study the mystical aspect of the runes from the information that is revealed in the myths and sagas. The suggestion from these sources is that the runes are emblematic of mysteries. In addition, one may learn further by actually using them. This need not require belief in magic, mysticism, or the occult, although the most tender of mind may embrace such beliefs.

How, then, can one use the runes? With respect to each futhark, every rune has a *graphic form*, a *name*, a *phonetic value*, a *literal meaning*, and an *esoteric meaning*. The first four of these qualities allow for the use of runes in writing. These four features define the runes, then, as *letter-runes*. Adding the feature of esoteric meanings to this redefines the runes more broadly. There are also ancient runes that were not codified into futharks, and therefore not used in writing, but did have symbolic meaning. These are the *glyph-runes*. It is this symbolic feature of glyph-runes that, when added to the letter-runes, give the latter an expanded potential.

What, then, do we know about the esoteric meaning of the letter-runes? As we have seen, the Eddic sources are not fully forthcoming. What we have, however, is a number of runic poems. First, is “The Old English Rune Poem,” believed to be as old as the late eighth or early ninth century, and transcribed from a manuscript dated near the end of the tenth century. That transcription was printed in 1705. The “Old English Rune Poem” contains a several-line stanza for each of the staves of its 29-rune version of the Elder Futhark (Thorsson, 1987).

“The Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme” is from the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century. Its two-line stanzas are particularly interesting insofar as the seemingly unrelated second line is actually an esoteric comment on the first line. So, in the instance of *fe*, “Money causes strife among kinsmen” is followed by “the wolf grows up in the

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woods” (Thorsson, 1987, pp. 100–101). This poem relates to the 16-rune Younger Futhark.

Although “The Old Icelandic Rune Poem” dates from the fifteenth century, it seemingly relates runic lore from a much older time. This poem, based on the 16-rune Younger Futhark, has a more complex construction than do the two others just discussed. Following each stanza appear a Latin translation of the rune name and an alliterating name for “chieftain” in Old Norse (Thorsson, 1987, pp. 101–103). These epimythium-like esoteric additions are not always included in the translations of “The Old Icelandic Rune Poem,” however. Björn Jónasson’s (2001) *En Liten Bok om Runer* (*A Little Book of Runes*) is a case in point. Again, choosing the first rune from Thorsson, with the Latin word translated, and with my simplified punctuation:

Money is the strife among kinsmen,  
and the fire of the flood-tide,  
and the path of the serpent.  
*gold      “leader of the war band”*

In addition to these better known poems, Thorsson (1987) related the “Abecedarium Nordmanicum” found in a manuscript from Switzerland and dated from the early 800s. As a whole, it appears as a mnemonic. That is to say, the short, and in some cases single word lines following the runes seem only to tie together the runic names in order to aid memory. Thorsson, however, suggested that in at least four instances there seems to be esoteric meaning conveyed. The runes are from the Younger Futhark, but I note that one of the literal meanings associated with them is from the Elder Futhark. This is not so surprising, given the early date of the “Abecedarium Nordmanicum.” Given that during the transition from the Elder Futhark to the Younger Futhark the two rune sets were sometimes mixed, as we have earlier noted, why not the meanings as well?

From the description of rune casting reported by Tacitus, it is clear enough how to proceed. He has provided instruction in making a rune set, as well. Surely, then, these rune poems have provided an adequate balance of mystery and suggestion for those who wish to pose an issue and contemplate the guidance of the runes, seeking not for an answer to a question, but open to considering some issue from the perspective of a runic meaning. This may allow one to depart from habitual ways of thinking and open oneself to a fresh frame of mind. For those who do seek further and detailed tutoring in the use of the runes, including the rune

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poems themselves, there are many popular books available which, if carefully chosen, can be of immense help. Again, *caveat emptor*, lest you fall into a morass of New Age embellishment.

Let us consider the runes in relation to the person using them. Psychologically speaking, we can recognize multiple levels of their use. First, and as it is commonly phrased, one *consults* the runes. However, we might say that *to cast the runes is to consult the mysteries of which the runes are emblematic*. Looking at the process even more deeply, the mysteries are evoked in the mind of the rune caster. Therefore, interpretation is in order, the unravelling of the mystery in the context of the issue for which the runes were cast. This is the task put to the mind of the caster of the runes. The runes can best be seen in this light as tools, implements that mediate between the mysteries and the mind of the one using them.



Younger Futhark

fé	úr	thurs	áss	reidh	kaun
	hagall	naudh	íss	ár	sól
Tyr	byarkan	madhr	lögr	yr	

Let us consider, then, the literal meaning of each of the runes of the Younger Futhark:

<i>Old Norse Name</i>	<i>Literal Meaning</i>
fé	cattle, money, gold
úr	drizzling rain
thurs	giant
áss	god, Ódhinn
reidh	a ride, riding

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<i>Old Norse Name</i>	<i>Literal Meaning</i>
kaun	a sore
hagall	hail
naudh	need, difficulty, distress
íss	ice
ár	(good) year, harvest
sól	sun
Tyr	the god Tyr
byarkan	birch, (birch-goddess)
madhr	man, human
lögr	sea, water
yr	yew, bow of yew wood

'Tis time to chant      on the sage's chair:  
                                  at the well of Urth  
 I saw but said naught      I saw and thought,  
                                  Listened to Hár's lore;  
 Of runes I heard men speak      unraveling them  
 —"Hávamál" or "The Sayings of Hár" (Odin)  
 (*The Poetic Edda*) [Hollander, 1962, p. 30]

If the casting of runes is viewed as a mediated encounter with the mysteries, there is, then, also a traditional, immediate method of encounter. This is the *útiseta*, the sitting out. This was a private, isolating ritual in which the practitioner would literally sit out, alone, in some place apart from other people and from other distractions. There, the person would remain in contemplation until a resolution or answer came for the issue in question. Favored among male diviners or *spámadr*, this practice is found with some frequency in the sagas. In terms of the isolation, this practice echoes Odin's shamanic initiation.

In Pennick's (1989) words, "*útiseta* or *sitting out* is an important technique, where a person 'sits out' under the stars to hear inner voices and commune with the universe.... Suitable locations for sitting out are high places of ancient sanctity, preferably those away from populated areas.... Solitary, wild places" (p. 114).

An historically important example is offered in the person of Torgeir Ljósveitningagodi. In the year 1000 CE, a climax was reached in the dispute over which religion should be practiced by the people of Iceland. King Olafur Tryggvason of Norway had made captive four sons of Icelandic chieftains and sent two of his men to Iceland with an ultimatum, that being, Christianize! A divided Iceland was on the brink of civil war. The pro-Christian faction was represented at the Althing (assembly of chieftains)

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by Hallur at Sida. Torgeir represented the pagans. Recognizing that having two Law Speakers at the Althing would not resolve the issue, Hallur resigned, allowing Torgeir to speak for all Icelanders. Torgeir went to his private booth at the assembly, covered himself in furs, and sat. Emerging the following day, Torgeir announced his considered decision. Iceland would officially be Christian and all who were not baptized should be so. However, he let it be known that certain pagan traditions would be allowed as long as they were practiced in private. This included the exposure of unwanted babies, eating of horse flesh, and sacrifices to the old gods. If discovered, these practices could result in banishment for three years. “We can conclude from this that the change over (*sic*) to Christianity, though an important issue, was not taken too seriously.” In addition, “some scholars have pointed out that many Icelandic chieftains probably conceded to being baptised (*sic*) out of fear of King Olafur invading and conquering the country himself. Thus, to a large extent, the decision to convert was not spiritual but political” (Program of the Ernst J. Backman Saga Museum, Reykjavik, Iceland, p. 19). Be that as it may, and given the tradition of *útiseti*, we may take Torgeir as an example.

A further example, taken from Snorri’s *Heimskringla*, mentions Tordis Segga as “the woman who, it is said, *sat out* (my italics) working the magic” that generated the message that Hacon “should fight against King Inge in the night but never in the day-time, and then all would go well” (Sturlason, 1990, p. 704). Following the word of Tordis Segga, Hacon and his army were victorious. Interestingly, Erling Monsen, editor of this edition of Snorri’s *Heimskringla* added the following footnote. “To ‘sit out,’ in O.N. *sitja uti*, was the expression used for troll women or witches, who carried on their witchcraft outside in the night, in order to wake up the witches or trolls” (p. 704).

This practice is documented in *The Poetic Edda* (Hollander, 1962), too. In the “*Voluspá*” or “The Prophecy of the Seeress,” there appears a line in which the seeress speaks of herself in the third person: “Alone she sat out...” (p. 5). Hollander gave an explanation in a footnote, saying “‘Sitting out’ is the technical expression for the witches’ and sorcerers’ communing with spirits, out of doors at night” (p. 5).

In the above explication of the context in which the nine worlds of Norse mythology are embedded, it is easy to overlook the numerical aspect of that context. That is, in looking at the qualitative elements of that gestalt, for which Yggdrasil, the Norns, and the runes are emblematic, one



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may not be alert to the presence of the quantitative element that is involved. The numbers 3 and 9 may speak softly, but they are ubiquitous in this mythology. They recur time and time again in a whole host of circumstances. The very fact of how often they occur establishes them as both meaningful and symbolic.

Not surprisingly, the use of the number “3” did not escape the notice of Grimm (2012). He acknowledged this by mentioning “the prevalence among valkyrs (*sic*) as well as norns of the number three” (p. 425). First, let us provide evidence for the wide use of the number 3. Perhaps the best way to do this is by means of a random list, as follows:

The universe is constituted of 3 levels, a lower, a middle, and an upper;  
According to some scholars, there are 3 worlds at each level of this empyrean trilogy;  
Audhumla licked the salty ice-blocks for 3 days before bringing forth Buri;  
Bor (son of Buri) married Bestla and they had 3 sons, Odin, Vili, and Vé;  
There are 3 wells, the Well of Mimir, the Well of Hvergelmir, and the Well of Urd;  
Yggdrasil has 3 roots;  
There are 3 heavens, Asgaard, Vanaheim, and Alfheim constitute one, above that is Andlang, and still farther above is a third heaven, Vidbláin;  
There are 3 norns, Urd, Verdandi, and Skuld;  
There are 3 major gods, Odin, Frey, and Thor;  
Loki sired 3 monstrous children, Fenrir, Hel, and Jörmungand;  
The dwarfs Eitri and Brokk made 3 sets of gifts of two each for Odin, Frey, and Thor;  
There are 3 classes of humankind, thrall, karl, and jarl;  
The gods often travel in 3s, Odin, Loki, and Thor, or Odin, Loki, and Hoenir;  
Thor struck Skrymir (Utgard-Loki) 3 blows from Mjöllnir;  
Of four travelers, 3 accepted challenges from Utgard-Loki, Thjálfí, Loki, and Thor;  
A beguiled Thjálfí lost 3 foot races to Hugi (Utgard-Loki’s thought);

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A beguiled Thor was challenged to 3 contests, lifting Utgard-Loki's cat (Jörmungand), emptying a drinking horn (the sea), and wrestling with Utgard-Loki's foster mother, Elli (old age);  
In trying to drink the sea, Thor drank 3 huge drafts from Utgard-Loki's horn;  
Hreidmar had 3 sons, Fafnir, Regin, and Otter;  
Upon the death of the giant, Ölvaldi, his 3 sons, Thjazi, Idi, and Gang divided his gold into a mouthful each;  
Odin slept 3 nights with the giantess Gunnlöd in order to obtain 3 drinks of the poetic mead;  
Gudrun had 3 sons, Sörli, Hamdir, and Erp;  
Sigurd, Gunnar, and Högni became 3 sworn brothers;  
Mökkurkalfi, the clay calf that was to aid the giant, Hrungnir in fighting Thor, was 3 miles broad at the armpits;  
In the war between the Æsir and the Vanir, Gullveig was gashed with spears and burned 3 times, only to be reborn 3 times to wander and cast spells;  
It took 3 tries for the Æsir to catch Loki (in the form of a salmon) in the net before Thor caught him by the tail;  
Loki was bound by the Æsir to 3 stones, one under his shoulder, one under his loins, and one under his knee-joints;  
Before Ragnarök, there will be 3 winters accompanied by wars throughout the whole world;  
Following the winters of war, there will be 3 winters of hard frosts and biting winds and driven snow, with no summers between.

Surely, too many instances for coincidence. Surely, too, the list is not exhaustive. What, then, is the explanation for the plethora of groupings of three? First of all, the extensive use of threes should be of no surprise to anyone familiar with world folktales. In 1909, Olrik presented what he termed the "law of repetition," which he believed governed the composition of all myths, sagas, and legends. By means of repetition, the element that is repeated is given increased intensity, dimension, and significance. Furthermore, Olrik was impressed by the threefold repetition of story elements. As a sub-type of the law of repetition, he invoked the "law of three." He concluded that this law "extends like a broad swath cut through the world of folk tradition, through the centuries and millennia of human culture" (Baushatz, 1982, p. 24). Olrik saw the use of repetition as a dominant

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force, used to call attention to aspects or elements of the narrative whose importance is to be focused on or heightened.

In a parallel vein, Lévi-Strauss later remarked about the addiction of myths to duplication, triplication, or quadruplication of elements. In his case, he emphasized that such repetition serves to make the structure of the myth more apparent (Baushatz, 1982). Even if not versed in the work of Orlik or Lévi-Strauss, any good professor or teacher at any level has heard some version of “If you want them to remember, tell them three times!” Thus, scholarly version and practical version of this principle converge.

Is there, however, more to be said specifically about three? From his psychoanalytic perspective, Bettelheim (1989) gave an unequivocal answer in the affirmative. In both the conscious and the unconscious mind, numbers stand for family relations and situations. As such, and in the child’s mind, two stands for two parents and three for the child, her or himself, in relationship to the parents. For both child and adult, the one-in-charge and Number One, can refer to the boss, and the latter can be a self-reference. Calling further on depth psychology, Bettelheim invoked the image of Adam, Eve, and the snake, a threesome symbolic of carnal knowledge. Extending this, he stated that the number three, itself, stands for sex insofar as each sex is distinguished by three visible sex characteristics: one vagina and two breasts in the woman, one penis and two testes in the man. Furthermore, the number three stands in the unconscious for the oedipal situation with its three-person drama. Sometimes, Bettelheim stated, three may represent the id, the ego, and the superego. While Bettelheim offered intriguing application of his theory to specific fairy tales, such application to the Norse myths is beyond the scope of the present writing. And, even though its application may not be apparent in this case, his theory at least addresses the issue of the specific saliency of the number three. That is, why is it that three is the number so often chosen for the repetition of story elements?

Bettelheim (1989) also recognized three as a mystical or even holy number, stating that this was the case even before the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Turning to Cirlot’s (1962) *A Dictionary of Symbols*, provides explanation of the ternary system as being “created by the emergence of a third (latent) element which so modifies the binary situation as to impart to it a dynamic equilibrium” (p. 318). Or, as Cirlot states, unity split into three moments, the active, the passive, and unity or outcome

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of these two. "Hence three has the power to resolve the conflict that is posed by dualism" (p. 318). Such resolution is found, then, in low, middle, high and in bad, indifferent, and good, as well as past, present, future. The middle term in these and countless other examples resolves the conflict. And, this ternary system establishes the importance of three in the human mind, be that conscious or unconscious. Thus established, that number would tend to be called upon widely and often.

Anyone familiar with the philosophy of G.F. Hegel will be reminded of the central notion of his work, the *dialectic*. This term is one that he borrowed from Plato. For Plato, the dialectic was a method of argumentation based on what is now known as the method of the contrary case. Hegel expanded Plato's concept into a logical process which proceeds from a *thesis* to an *antithesis*, and to a *synthesis* of the two. For Hegel, this is an actual process that world events follow.

All change, especially historical change, takes place in accordance with the law of the dialectic; a thesis is produced, it develops an opposition (its antithesis), a conflict between them ensues, and the conflict is resolved into a synthesis which includes both thesis and antithesis [Popkin & Stroll, 1956, p. 65].

The synthesis is constituted of what is of most value in both the thesis and the antithesis. Furthermore, Hegel believed, he had discovered a law of nature, in fact, a necessary law of nature. Therefore, history can best be understood by viewing the development of nations through the lens of the dialectic. Later, Karl Marx was to apply Hegel's dialectic to classes rather than to nations as Hegel had done.

Arguably, the dialectic as expounded by Hegel and applied to the history of nations, and the application by Marx to the understanding of class struggle left an imprint of the ternary on our culture. This may be in resonance with the felt sense of groupings of three found in the Norse myths (as well as other folktales).

In his *Practical Magic in the Northern Tradition*, Pennick (1989) stated that the threefold structure of all things was a widespread system found throughout early northern Europe. "The threefold system is based upon the sequential nature of all things, which have a beginning, a span in the middle and an end. These are all versions of the fundamental triad of being: formation, preservation, and destruction" (p. 138). With historical examples, Pennick made the point that conceptually bad things as well as conceptually good things were often offered in threes.

Interestingly, in Old Norse there are, grammatically speaking, three

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genders and three numbers recognized, as well as three moods, three voices, three intensities of adjectives, and three persons. Nouns, pronouns, the adjectives which modify them, and definite articles all belong to one of three genders: masculine, feminine, or neuter. First and second person personal pronouns may be singular, dual (two), or plural (three or more). Verbs may be of indicative, subjunctive, or imperative mood. Furthermore, verbs may be of active voice, passive voice, or middle voice. Adjectives may be of basic form, comparative, or superlative. As for person, there are, of course, first person, second person, and third person (Byock, 2013). Not surprisingly, given that English and Old Norse are both Germanic languages, much of their respective grammar is basically the same. We need not be concerned with the intricacies of these shared grammatical forms. The notable differences are with the three genders (masculine, feminine, neuter) which are so prominent in Old Norse, and the three numbers (singular, dual, and plural) with respect to personal pronouns. The point is, grammatically speaking, that Old Norse was immersed in subsystems of threes! So, both the language of the Vikings and their mythology reveal a striking parallel, that being the extensive reliance on three as a quantitative organizer in their world.

As interesting as the contemplation of the role of the number three in the world of Norse mythology may be, there is yet to be considered the equally ubiquitous number nine. Once more, a partial list of occurrences is in order:

There are 9 worlds in the Norse cosmography;  
Odin hung on the world tree 9 nights;  
Odin mastered 9 mighty songs (galdr);  
Odin learned to use 18 runes,  $2 \times 9$ ;  
Hermod the Bold, son of Odin, rode Sleipnir 9 nights to Hel to  
seek Balder's release;  
Draupnir, the magic ring forged by Eitri for Odin, dropped 8 more  
gold rings, making a total of 9, every 9 nights;  
Usually, 9 Valkyries rode together;  
When Oden threw his hone into the air, Baugi's 9 serfs cut each  
other to pieces with their scythes;  
Groá chanted 9 spells to her son Svipdag to aid him on his journey  
to win the hand of Mengloth;  
Svipdag was told the names of 9 dwarfs who made the golden floor  
of Mengloth's hall;

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Before Mengloth's knees sat 9 maidens;  
Njord and Skadi lived alternately 9 nights in Thrymheim and 9  
nights in Noatun;  
Heimdall was born of 9 virgin sisters;  
Mökkurkalfi, the clay calf that was to aid the giant, Hrungrnir in  
fighting Thor, was 9 miles high;  
Adam of Bremen reported, circa 1076 CE, that 9 of every living  
creature was sacrificed at the temple in Uppsala;  
German Bishop Thietmar of Mersebourg wrote, circa 1000 CE, of  
sacrifices celebrated in Lejre in Denmark every 9 years. Men,  
horses, dogs, and cocks were sacrificed, 99 each.

Nine is the triplication of the triple, the triple ternary. In terms of mathematical operations, three multiplied by three equals nine, as does three squared. Perhaps it is the recognition of these relationships that contributes to the special position of nine in Norse mythology. Possibly, when the number three was not sufficient in the quantification of elements of the mythopoetic work, the number nine bore the responsibility. Nine is intimately related to three, mathematically, as well as mystically, as shown above, and it serves as a quantitative leap. When three is not enough to establish the level of focused intention, dimension, or the heightened emphasis desired, perhaps nine is the next choice. It may be judged enough larger, and yet not so large as to strain mythopoetic credibility. This is not to say that numbers between three and nine are totally absent in the Norse myths, but they are rare. Predominantly, we see groupings of threes or of nines. Even so, the latter number is given special notice. Hollander (1962) referred to it as "the holy number nine" (p. 150).

Before leaving our examination of the role of the numbers three and nine in Norse mythology, perhaps it would be instructive to consider what contemporary cognitive psychologists might have to say. Such consideration takes us into the realm of memory, and more specifically, *short-term memory* (STM). Hopefully, it will be clarifying rather than confusing to list some synonyms of STM: primary memory, elementary memory, immediate memory, supervisory attention system, and working memory. Working memory (WM) is, perhaps, the most frequently used of these synonyms. It implies a place where mental work is taking place. This is where "the present moment" is held in consciousness, the seat of consciousness

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attention. "This is where comprehension occurs" (Radvansky & Ashcraft, 2014, p. 138).

One aspect of short-term or working memory is immediate recall of numbers to which one has just been exposed, a task known as *digit span*. Since the publication of a classic paper on this subject in 1956, the limits of digit span were believed to be well known. When hearing a list of, say ten digits, read somewhat rapidly, most adults can remember seven, plus or minus two. In other words, most people will be able to repeat between five and nine of the digits. Importantly, this situation holds for a list of unrelated words, as well. This limit of STM or WM was long accepted and even offered a rationale for including a digit span task as one of the subtests on standardized intelligence tests. Using seven, plus or minus two as a baseline, it was found that both young children and persons with lower than average intelligence have, in general, a shorter memory span (Radvansky & Ashcraft, 2014).

More recent research has, however, revealed that most people can hold only four, plus or minus one, units of information in STM or WM! This 2010 research showed that the earlier and long-accepted digit span was achieved by a process of *chunking*. That is, lists of longer than four units, plus or minus one, were grouped into units (chunks of information) such as with a telephone number, 111-111-1111 or a social security number, 111-11-1111 (Radvansky & Ashcraft, 2014). Each chunk could be four, plus or minus one, and there could then be four chunks, plus or minus one. Such recoding into a lesser number of units, reducing the number of units that have to be held in STM or WM, is common throughout both *The Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*. For example, the six dragons that eat at the roots of Yggdrasil, are paired as follows: Góin and Móin, Grábak and Grafvolluth, Ofnir and Sváfnir (Hollander, 1962, p. 60). Thus, six units are reduced to three. Can this be only in the service of poetic meter?

Perhaps, the digit span or unrelated word limit of four, plus or minus one, is a factor in the extensive use of three in folktales, three brothers, three wishes, three rings, and so on so forth. In terms of fairytales, a major part of folktales, the intended audience is a young one. For this audience, the number four, may best be adjusted downward, as we have seen explained. Thus, four minus one brings us to the ubiquitous three. This common number may have carried over to other forms of folktales such as myths, particularly since three things are easily remembered. The other reasons for three, as earlier suggested, may still pertain. Those hypotheses and

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the present one are by no means mutually exclusive. Invoking Freud's principle of *overdeterminism*, it could be argued that both the limits of STM or WM and other hypotheses may be at work simultaneously to determine the ubiquity of three elements in folktales of all kinds. In light of the idea of chunking, nine may be regarded as three chunks of three. Thus, we may add this consideration from cognitive psychology to the mathematical and mystical explanations already presented. Given the suggestion of inadequacy of explanation by any one of these alone, taken together we may be closer to understanding the sacredness of the number nine.

Let us leave this quantitative perspective on the context of Norse mythology and inquire more abstractly into the qualitative. If we consider the very dimensions of existence, that is, *space*, *time*, and *consciousness*, then we can elect Yggdrasil, the Norns, and the runes as respectively emblematic of these. These dimensions are existential parameters, if you will, and in the system of Norse mythology, they are represented as follows. Yggdrasil serves as a metaphor for space or *extension*. It is the core of a cosmography of nine worlds, joining them while at the same time defining their relative positions, one to the other in a living, organic system. It connects the nine worlds on three planes, an empyrean trilogy. Yggdrasil defines an above, a middle, and a below, as well as a north, a south, an east, and a west. At the same time, its structure sets both relative distances of the worlds and the routing for movement of sentient beings among them. For example, the path from Asgaard to Midgaard is over Bifröst, the rainbow bridge. And, the ride to Hel takes nine nights, including the days between.

And so, distance, the practical, every-day understanding of extension segues easily into the next existential parameter, that of *duration* or time. Space-cum-time, extension-cum-duration, relationships wrestled with by both the inhabitants of the mythopoetic world and the physicists of our age. The Norns reckoned a past-heavy time wherein past led to present, and present became the new past with value added. They embody the *wyrd* as *ørlog* becomes manifest through them. The spiral of my existence widens as each present moment is constituted of more and more past. A past continuously accruing from a fleeting present, a future as an illusion, not even deserving of grammatical legitimacy.

The third existential parameter is that of consciousness or *awareness*. And here we enter into the subtle meaning of the runes, the mysteries themselves. Some of the runes of the Viking futhark clearly correspond



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to various of the nine worlds. Others may perhaps do so by implication. As each world is dominated by a certain consciousness, these runes stand as symbols of the respective consciousness, for a particular awareness. Let us consider these runes:

<i>Old Norse Spelling</i>	<i>Literal Meaning and Cosmic Connection</i>
fé	cattle, money, gold implies Svartalfheim, greedy dwarfs;
úr	drizzling rain implies Hel and the cold drizzle of her realm;
thurs	giant corresponds to Jötenheim and the destructive thurses;
áss	god, Ódhinn corresponds to Asgaard and the Æsir;
íss	ice implies Niflheim;
ár	(good) year, harvest implies Vanaheim and the fertility gods;
sól	sun implies Muspelheim and its fires;
Tyr	the god Tyr corresponds to Asgaard;
madhr	man, human corresponds to Midgaard.

More is to be added concerning the rune, áss, and its correspondence to Asgaard and the Æsir. This is perhaps the most complex of the runes. This is consistent with the decided trend that as we move upward from one level to the next of the empyrean trilogy, we find increasing complexity. Otherwise stated, as we move upward there is greater variance among those who inhabit a given world. We can discern three aspects of the warrior gods, corresponding to three well-known archetypes, even though the mantle of warrior is overarching for all of the Æsir. First, we can recognize the wisdom of Odin, gained by his drinking from the Well of Mimir, his shamanic initiation into the runic mysteries, and his drinking of the mead of inspiration. Wisdom, of course, was not exclusively his. Too, he knows both galdr and seidr magic, and is skilled at shape-shifting. Thus, he embodies the archetype of the Priest-Magician. Thor, clearly, is more purely of the Warrior archetype. Finally, Tyr manifests the archetype of the Judge-King. He seems to have preceded Odin in ruling over all gods and goddesses, and to have made the sacrifice in the jaws of Fenrir that no other would make.

Additionally, as we have seen, each rune has an esoteric meaning, as to some degree suggested in the various rune poems. These meaning may be applied, of course, to the following runes as well as all of those above. I leave it to the interested reader to plumb those sources:

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reidh	a ride, riding;
kaun	a sore;
hagall	hail;
naudh	need, difficulty, distress;
byarkan	birch, (birch-goddess);
lögr	sea, water;
yr	yew, bow of yew wood.

Curiously, there is evidence that the yew, *Taxus baccata*, contains an alkaloid that may be prepared as a hallucinogen. According to Edred Thorsson (1984), a professor of medicine at the University of Greiz by the name of Kukowka “discovered that on warm days the yew emits a gaseous toxin that lingers in the shade of the tree and may cause hallucinations” (p. 45). If this is so, then the esoteric meaning of the yr rune is expanded even beyond its meaning as a desirable wood for the making of bows.

Norse mythology presents us with nine worlds, at once both defined and contextualized by the parameters of extension, duration, and consciousness. This matrix of space, time, and awareness is richly symbolized by the tree, Yggdrasil, the Norns, and the runes, and related to us in patterns of threes and nines. To understand this, we are told, is to be wise. This, however, is a task worthy of Odin, himself!

## The Wisdom of Odin

Perhaps we can see only dimly the nine worlds in their meaning-filled context of extension, duration, and consciousness. We may struggle to look beyond the physicality of Yggdrasil, the Norns, and the runes and to gaze into the deep symbolism beyond, let alone gain a glimpse of the significance of the three and the nine.

In order to have such sight, perhaps better termed, insight, one may need to have reached what Jung described as the third and final level of libidinal development, the intellectual or ideational period. Jung suggested that this usually begins in the late thirties or early forties, if at all. If attained, then “values are sublimated in social, religious, civic, and philosophical symbols. He is transformed into a spiritual man” (Hall & Lindzey, 1970, p. 99). But, for this stage to be reached, two earlier stages must be successfully navigated. Jung was much less detailed than Freud in specifying stages of development. He did, however, indicate that in the very early years, libido is invested in activities having to do with survival. Sexual values normally begin to appear sometime before the age of five, and reach their zenith during adolescence. Extending into early adult years, the person is energetic, passionate, and impulsive, although still dependent on others. During this stage of life, one is normally focused on establishing a career, a family of one’s own, and a place in one’s community. These activities are, of course, extroverted ones. The final libidinal stage is marked by a replacement of these more youthful interests and pursuits with pursuits that are more cultural in nature, with a concomitant introverse shift in focus.

Jung’s term “spiritual man” may beg for clarification, if not explication. The latter can be found, perhaps, in the work of William Blake. A poet, an artist, and a mystic, Blake created a highly complex mythopoetic philosophy. Without risking getting lost in its intricacies, and hopefully not

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doing unnecessary violence to the integrity of his structure, we may focus on his understanding of perception. Milton Klonsky (1977) suggested that Blake's insight reflects "the fourfold hermeneutics devised by cabbalists and scholastic commentators upon the Bible, whereby the literal-historical, the allegorical, the tropological (*sic*) (or moral), and, finally, the anagogical (or spiritual) levels of meaning in Scripture (*sic*) are successively revealed" (p. 11). Analogous to this fourfold hermeneutic interpretation of the Bible, Blake proposed four *Zoas*, or primordial human capacities. Dispensing with the esoteric names which he chose for each of these, they are *reason* (intellect), *instinct* (body), *passion* (emotion), and *imagination* (spirit). The analogous relationship between reason (intellect) and the literal-historical level of hermeneutic analysis should be readily recognized. So, too, with imagination (spirit) and the anagogical. The relationship between instinct and the allegorical, and the relationship between passion and the topological level, however, may require more serious contemplation. Without heading off on a tangent, interesting as it might prove to be, Blake related the four *Zoas* to the respective elements of air, water, fire, and earth. Briefly, if not superficially speaking, reason is an airy thing, delicate and insubstantial; instinct is of the body, which is filled with fluids, humors and such; emotions run from cold to fiery hot. Again, contemplation in depth may be essential in order to recognize a connection between imagination and the earth.

Anchored in his system of *Zoas*, Blake proposed four levels of vision. *Single vision* is outward, seen *with* rather than *through* one's eyes. Such vision is consensual. Blake was a stern critic of Newtonian science, his paragon example of single vision, cold, objective, and sterile.

*Twofold vision* brings with it an inward focus and thereby sees something more than is seen with single vision. This something more is personal. Blake, himself, offered as an example his seeing a thistle in his path. With single vision, it was but a thistle. But with twofold vision, he saw it as "an old Man (*sic*) grey" (Klonsky, 1977, p. 10). This personification was not a delusion of sense perception, a garden-variety of hallucination, but Blake's seeing the thistle for what it was when "heightened to Vision" (p. 10).

With *threefold vision*, enters passion. This is vision altered by the fires of passion, annealed in the erotic realm of the creative unconscious. With this level of vision, Blake revealed being filled with smiles or tears as he saw the "old Man (*sic*) grey."

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*Fourfold vision* was Blake's "supreme delight. [It] is only attained when the phenomenal world has been transcended by the Divine Imagination and reunited with Spirit" (Klonsky 1977, p. 11). From objective, consensual, single vision to fourfold vision inspired by imagination, by way of the twofold vision of personal meaning and impassioned threefold vision. Imagination is active, contrasting with the passivity of sterile, objective reason.

The Reasoners are Devourers, limited to the five senses of single vision, sterile and unimaginative. The Prolific, in contrast, are the Creators. It is they who are energized with imagination. In his illuminated work, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, apparently composed in 1790 and celebrated in 1793, Blake wrote his perhaps most famous lines:

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing (*sic*) would appear  
to man as it is, Infinite.  
For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks  
of his cavern [Blake, 1975, p. xxii].

With his doctrine of Contraries, it was Blake's wont to deal in oppositions, Heaven and Hell, Angel and Devil, Attraction and Repulsion, Love and Hate, and so forth. Placing Imagination above Reason, and identifying passive Reason with the Angel and active Imagination with the Devil, Blake turned convention upside down. Then, in his poetic fashion, he challenged us to cleanse our doors of perception, and to see. To see, that is, with fourfold vision! We can, I believe, extend the level of fourfold vision to our viewing of mythology. This is surely validated when we consider that Blake's fourfold method of vision seems to parallel, if not reflect, the cabbalistic fourfold hermeneutics. In so doing, we can elucidate Jung's spiritual man. A strong case can be made that the spiritual man is one who sees with fourfold vision. Thereby, such a person can regard a mythology more nearly in its fullness, attending to its literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical levels.

But, what of the person who either by choice or by limitation has not attained the level of Jung's spiritual man? The person Jung referred to, philosophically speaking, as a "simple soul" (Jung, 1966, p. 9)? Or the person whose vision falls short of fourfold vision? As stated earlier, religions consist of etiological stories, parables for moral instruction, allegorical explanation of the meaning of existence and its various sub-topics, and rituals that are based in that sacred text, designed to empower the text through direct bodily experience which may induce an altered state of

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consciousness. Without intention of disparagement, for such persons as Jung referred to as “simple souls,” religions offer interpretation and summarization of this complex body of wisdom found in their mythology. That is, core values are codified and morals precepts set forth. A set of laws, rules, or guidelines are arranged into a systematic code. Thereby, too, common sense and much mundane yet good advice may be offered.

Codification serves several ends. It is succinct, at once both brief and clear. In a sense, it is an encapsulation of the essence of the mythology. Brevity obviously makes the code easier to remember, while its clarity makes it easier to understand. Furthermore, the code is easily referred to when a question of moral action is sought or disputed. Such succinctness makes the code highly transportable; like a *vade mecum* it can be taken about easily, especially when memorized, while reflecting the values of an entire corpus of myth.

But, if succinctness is the positive side of codification, there is also a negative side. And that is the temptation to try to resolve a moral problem by blind application of the code. The theoretical rules or principles may be brought to bear without due consideration of the context of the specific instance in question. Such cases of casuistry do violence to the circumstances surrounding the event. The problem is one of relating the abstract principle to the concrete instance. Two closely related and potentially problematic questions are thereby raised. First, is the abstract principle relevant in this case? Secondly, are there ameliorating or otherwise altering circumstances? Interestingly, casuistry is a hallmark of fundamentalism. To quote Blake (1975, p. xxvii), “Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules.”

Another potential problem with codification as synopsis is that the much larger body of the mythology may be neglected. Details found in the myths which would lend nuance to the code may be missed. Importantly, the aesthetic qualities of the corpus may be overlooked. Obviously, the full experience of the mythology cannot be found in the distillate.

The conflict of beliefs and the competition for adherents between the traditional Norse religion and the imported-cum-imposed Christianity are well documented and widely discussed in both academic and popular literature such as historical fiction.

Each of these religions, Christianity and the Norse religion, is represented in highly abbreviated, codified form. In the case of Christianity, the code is, of course, in the form of the Ten Commandments. With

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respect to the Norse religion, the code is presented in *The Poetic Edda* in the form of “Hávamál” or “The Sayings of Hár” (Hollander, 1962), and the “Sayings of the High One” (Larrington, 1996), as earlier referenced.

A comparative analysis of Odin’s words and those presented by Moses to his people in the form of the Ten Commandments would surely enrich our understanding of the Norse religion. For all “people of the book,” Christians, Jews, and Muslims, the Decalogue is familiar, at least in its essence. Many who espouse one of these religions are no doubt unable to recite the commandments in toto, let alone verbatim, but nevertheless recognize their substance. By comparing and contrasting Odin’s sayings with the more familiar Decalogue, we can perhaps highlight some important differences in the two mythological outlooks. At the same time, the moral precepts that are contained in the mythology of the Norse should be revealed more clearly in their summarized form.

Let us turn first to the much more widely known code, the Decalogue. It is found first in the Hebrew Bible in the Pentateuch. This word is derived from the Greek word for five, *penta*, and books, *teuchos*. From the Greek, by way of Latin, the word entered our English vocabulary. The Pentateuch consists of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy and sets forth the law of God as revealed to Moses. That is to say, these five books contain the word or teachings of Moses. Within Judaism, this set of five books is known as the Torah. In Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, the five books of the Pentateuch, in the above order, are considered a single unit that introduces the Bible. This deep and shared tradition discloses the importance of the Pentateuch, and in turn, the Ten Commandments, to the Christian world, as well as the worlds of the Muslims and the Jews (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 2001 [henceforth, *NOAB*]).

Even though the Pentateuch is considered as a unit, the five books do not constitute a single book, as such. There is not one author, in addition to which each of the five books reflects many different traditions and sources. The word *torah* offers a clue as to the unity and cohesion of the Pentateuch. The word means law, and certainly much of the Pentateuch is devoted to stating Hebrew law. However, *torah* can also be translated as instruction or teaching. Thus, the teaching or instruction of Moses. Although the predominant belief in both church and synagogue up through the Renaissance was that the Torah was the divine word mediated through Moses, this view faded with the rise of rationalism as espoused by writers such as Hobbes and Spinoza. The idea that Moses was the

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author of a unified Torah was seriously questioned at this time. Consistent with the nineteenth century Documentary Hypothesis, it is now widely held among Biblical scholars that multiple editors or redactors combined four major documents or sources of the Pentateuch, perhaps in stages and over a long time period (NOAB, 2001).

The Ten Commandments are presented first in the Book of Exodus, Chapter 20, verses 2 through 17. The exact wording of the Decalogue differs, of course, with the various translations of the Pentateuch. Strictly speaking, the Decalogue means ten words, and words may be a better usage than commandments. However, commandment is the word more commonly used in the Christian tradition. It is not unusual, however, for the two words to be used interchangeably. What is important, here, is the crux of each of the commandments. These cruxes can be succinctly stated as follows:

- I. You shall have no other gods;
- II. You shall not make idols or worship them;
- III. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God;
- IV. You shall remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy;
- V. You shall honor your father and your mother;
- VI. You shall not murder;
- VII. You shall not commit adultery;
- VIII. You shall not steal;
- IX. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor;
- X. You shall not covet your neighbor's house, wife, male or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything belonging to your neighbor [NOAB, 2001].

Commandments III, and V through IX are rather terse in their actual wording. However, commandments I, II, and IV, are expanded upon with considerable elaboration. The tenth commandment, interestingly, lists specific categories of items which one is forbidden to covet, but otherwise is not elaborated. As straight forward as most of the commandments appear to be, there are, however, several points of clarification or explanation that are in order.

Note that the first commandment does not deny that there are other gods, only that the god who is speaking is the one god to be worshipped. In elaboration, this god who is speaking identified himself as the god who brought the Hebrew people out of Egypt, out of slavery. Building on this,



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in the second commandment, Israel is distinguished from those tribes whose deities were represented in human or animal form. And, tolerating no rivals for the devotion that he demanded, the speaker declared of himself, "I the Lord your God am a jealous God" (*NOAB*, 2001, p. 111, Hebrew Bible). He continued, declaring that he would show steadfast love down to the thousandth generation for those who loved him and kept his commandments. However, he would punish children for the iniquity of their parents, down to the third and the fourth generations. The third commandment is connected, still, for it has been interpreted as meaning the prohibition of the use of the divine name in swearing to a falsehood, or in the use of magic or divination.

Even as clear as the sixth and eighth commandments appear with their paucity of words, further explanation is needed. As for murder, this excludes the forms of killing that were allowed for Israel, namely capital punishment and in war. There is ambiguity in the eighth commandment, too, where the word that is translated as steal can likewise be taken to mean kidnap. Perhaps of considerable significance, some scholars, upon examining the wording of the final commandment carefully, have concluded that these commandments address only the adult male (*NOAB*, 2001).

Later, in Exodus, Chapter 34, verses 1 to 35, God renewed the covenant. Moses cut two tablets of stone like the earlier ones and, following forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai, taking neither food nor drink, wrote the Ten Commandments for a second time. In addition, a different version of commandments is inserted in the text. This version, referred to by scholars as the Ritual Decalogue, presents details of rituals to be performed as well as prohibitions. These observances include the eating of unleavened bread, resting on the seventh day or Sabbath, observance of the ritual calendar, and offering of the best of the first fruits to God, as well as the firstborn males of livestock. The details sometimes bespeak the complexity of the law. For instance, the firstborn of a donkey should be redeemed with a lamb, insofar as the donkey is considered an unclean animal. If not redeemed, the donkey's neck should be broken. The firstborn of sons, too, are to be redeemed. The prohibitions include the worshipping of any other gods and the casting of idols, and like the observance of the Sabbath, these are reiterations of what had been stated earlier in the first iteration of the Decalogue. Further prohibitions include making covenants with the inhabitants of the land to which the Hebrews

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were going. Not only were such covenants not to be made, but the alters of the foreign people were to be razed to the ground and their sacred poles cut down. Less dramatic, but no less solemn, was the prohibition of boiling a kid in its mother's milk (*NOAB*, 2001).

The rationale for each of the items of the Ritual Decalogue may not be obvious. For centuries, scholars, rabbis, and priests have debated and sought to understand these. Suffice it to say that the Ritual Decalogue concerns the covenant of God and the Hebrew people, based on Israel's God's total claim to the loyalty of the people. To the devout, the performance of the ritual and following of the Ten Commandments guarantees the covenant. Violations, therefore, are taken seriously. Even though God claimed to be merciful, gracious, and slow to anger, Moses declared that anyone who did any work on the Sabbath, including even the kindling of a fire in one's dwelling, would be put to death! Again, as for the guilty, the iniquity of the parents will be visited "upon the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation" (*NOAB*, 2001, p. 132, Hebrew Bible).

All artisans and designers, all who had skill in any kind of craft were led by Moses to construct the tabernacle according to God's instructions. The third book of the Pentateuch, Leviticus, prescribes in some detail the rituals to be performed in these tabernacle tents. For vows and purification rites, freewill offerings and daily offerings, as well as for festivals, burnt offerings were to be made. In order of economic value, bulls, male sheep and goats, and birds were offered on the altar's fires. If birds, it should be turtledoves or pigeons. Cereal offerings were also made, and probably were seen as occupying a place below that of birds. Only grain without leaven or honey was to be used, and then only choice flour with oil and frankincense, or a cake or wafer baked without leaven. Part was to be sent up in smoke, making a pleasing odor for the Lord, while the remaining moiety was for the priests. Step-by-step prescriptions are given, and in the case of animals, these include how the animal was to be killed, how it was to be cut apart, and how the blood was to be dashed upon the alter and the doorway of the tent before the parts were to be burned on the alter. The burnt animal offerings were unusual in that the animal was completely consumed in the flames. Therefore, neither the priest nor the worshippers partook of these offerings (*NOAB*, 2001).

What has just been outlined from the book of Leviticus is but the briefest summary of the intricate instructions offered for the priests, the

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tribe of Levi. Most of Leviticus is written in blocks of laws. There are detailed dietary laws having political-symbolic purpose prescribed, as well as other issues concerning purity and impurity, economic laws, and ethical concerns (*NOAB*, 2001). Although not of the Ten Commandments or of the Ritual Decalogue, these solemn prescriptions further illuminate the nature of the Hebrew law. Keep in mind that the Ten Commandments, per se, are not only embedded in this larger corpus of law, but are at the very core of these dictates.

The Decalogue appears again in the fifth and final book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy. As presented in Deuteronomy, Chapter 5, verses 6 through 21, the casual reader would notice no substantial differences from the version of the Decalogue found in Exodus. The differences are for the most part subtle and best left to the Biblical scholars with their hermeneutics.

In addition to the re-presentation of the Ten Commandments, Deuteronomy is a further book of Hebrew law. Its English name, in fact, means second law. Deuteronomy sets forth statutes and ordinances reaching from dietary restrictions to regulation of slaves, from the integrity of the judicial system to waging of holy war, and from cross-dressing to sacrificial rites. Taken out of the full context, some of the laws or ordinances seem peculiar, if not, bizarre. To wit, “no one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord” (*NOAB*, 2001, p. 282, Hebrew Bible). Consideration of the wider context may clarify such as this, however. Some other statutes suggest a nuanced consideration of context. For example, if an engaged woman is raped by a man in the open countryside, only the man should be punished. Since the rape happened in the open country, the woman may have cried for help, but there was no one to rescue her, and therefore the woman has committed no offense. The man, however, is to be put to death. Whether one agrees with any or all of the handling of this situation, the point is that some of these early laws showed evidence of nuanced consideration. Not to get too far afield, Deuteronomy is a book of law, and at the very nucleus of this corpus of law are the Ten Commandments.

Given that the purpose of the present explication the Decalogue is to juxtapose it with the “Hávamál,” and given that it was Christianity that seriously confronted the pagan faith, it is important to consider the Christian interpretation of the Decalogue. Thus, we must turn first to the New Testament.

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According to the scriptures, specifically Matthew, Chapter 15, Jesus spoke of the commandments. The context, here, is highly important. Pharisees and scribes coming from Jerusalem challenged Jesus because his disciples did not wash their hands before eating. They asked why the disciples broke this tradition of the elders. Jesus responded by asking why they, the challengers, broke a commandment of God for the sake of tradition! In verse 4, he then quoted God as saying, "Honor your father and your mother." Continuing with the quotation, "Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die" (*NOAB*, 2001, p. 30, New Testament). He then pointed out that they would allow a son not to honor his father if the son declared that the support he would otherwise have given to his father he had given to God. "So for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God" (p. 30). Herein, Jesus made his position clear by placing the Commandments above tradition, *per se*.

Continuing, in verse 19, Jesus spoke to his disciples as follows. "What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander" (*NOAB*, 2001, p. 31, New Testament). Thus, as noted above, Jesus referred to the fifth of the Commandments, that of honoring one's father and mother, following which he alluded, although somewhat obliquely, to the sixth, murder; the seventh, adultery; the eighth, theft; and the ninth, false witness.

It should be of no surprise that Jesus should at least allude to the Ten Commandments. Furthermore, the context in which he made such reference and allusion make his particular selections from the Ten Commandments understandable. This is particularly true for murder, adultery, theft, and false witness or slander. But it may be of particular interest that he named fornication, in addition to adultery. This is but a reflection of the complexity of Mosaic law contained in the statutes and ordinances handed down from God to Moses concerning sexual behavior. And, as given in Matthew, Chapter 5, verse 17, Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (*NOAB*, 2001, p. 14, New Testament).

Returning to Leviticus, Chapter 18, verses 1 to 5, the Lord admonished Moses to speak to his people and remind them to observe the Lord's ordinances and to keep his statutes. Verses 6 to 23 then lay out laws prohibiting incestuous relationships, intercourse with a menstruating wife, male homosexuality, and intercourse with animals, in addition to adultery. With

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respect to incestuous relationships, “none of you shall approach anyone near of kin to uncover nakedness” (*NOAB*, 2001, p. 168, Hebrew Bible). By way of explanation, kin were then specified as being mothers, aunts, sisters, daughters, and granddaughters, including in-laws. The term “nakedness” was used in reference to the genitals, and to “uncover nakedness” was, then, a euphemism for sexual intercourse.

According to Leviticus, several of the proscriptions of sexual behaviors were punishable by the death of both parties involved. The following are such cases: adultery with the wife of one’s neighbor; adultery with one’s father’s wife; adultery with one’s daughter-in-law; sex with another man. In the case of sex with an animal, either by a man or a woman, the penalty was death for the human and for the animal. Incest with one’s sister was punishable by banishment of both parties. For lying with a woman during her menses, likewise. Punishment, too, would come for sex with one’s aunt, be that the sister of one’s father, sister of one’s mother, or otherwise a wife of one’s uncle (*NOAB*, 2001, Hebrew Bible).

Of particular interest is the case of a man who takes his brother’s wife. It is said that they shall remain childless. This law, however, seems on the surface inconsistent with an ancient custom, that of levirate marriage. The importance of this custom is such that an explanatory passage from Deuteronomy (Chapter 25, verses 5 to 6) seems to be in order:

When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband’s brother to her, and the first-born whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel [*NOAB*, 2001, p. 285, Hebrew Bible].

The relevance, and, in turn, the importance of the tradition of the levirate marriage, is revealed in its connection with a man named Onan, son of Judah. In Genesis, Chapter 38, verses 7 to 10, we are told that when God deemed Er, Judah’s first-born son, to be wicked, the Lord put him to death. Judah then instructed his second-born son, Onan, saying,

“Go in to your brother’s wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her.” But since Onan knew that the offspring would not be his, he spilled his semen on the ground whenever he went in to his brother’s wife, so that he would not give offspring to his brother. What he did was displeasing in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also [*NOAB*, 2001, p. 64, Hebrew Bible].

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*Nota bene:* What Onan is described of having done is, specifically, *coitus interruptus*, the so-called withdrawal method of contraception. Onan did not fulfill his obligation of levirate marriage. Is it not this that displeased the Lord? This passage from Genesis is, however, often interpreted as a prohibition of masturbation. And, this interpretation, or, as some would say, *misinterpretation*, has come down to Christianity by way of the Hebraic tradition. Others might explain the prohibition of masturbation not as a misinterpretation, but as a rabbinical extrapolation from Onan's act of spilling his semen on the ground. Seeing Onan's act in the context of securing and increasing the numbers of the Hebrew people, he wasted his semen. It is that which displeased the Lord.

The Mosaic code is highly complex, in and of itself, and the above discussion is patently inadequate for the appreciation of its intricacies. Hebraic scholars can spend a lifetime studying it and still lay no claim to full understanding.

Yet a further layer of nuance and complexity is disclosed if we examine what Christians consider the fulfillment of the Mosaic law through the teachings of Jesus. There is, then, the Christianized version, if you will. Although Jesus is obviously central to this Christian revision, some of his followers were also instrumental. But one example is the word of Paul as found in First Corinthians, Chapter 6, verses 9 to 10. Here he placed emphasis on the following offenses. "Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God" (NOAB, 2001, p. 275, New Testament). Herein, sexual offenses were elaborated to include not just adultery, but fornication, male prostitution, and sodomy. What is, perhaps, most noteworthy is not the items in themselves, for they are consistent with Hebrew law. What is remarkable is that Paul focused on these particular items. Especially interesting is Paul's mention of "drunkards" in his otherwise seemingly overemphasis on sexual offenses. Paul's pronouncement has certainly reverberated loudly throughout the ensuing centuries.

Even more engrossing, however, is Jesus' pronouncement of hell! In the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 9, verses 43 to 48, Jesus spoke as follows:

If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble,

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tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched [NOAB, 2001, pp. 75–76, New Testament].

Herein the allusion is to the final verse of Isaiah, Chapter 66, verse 24:

And they shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh [p. 1072, Hebrew Bible].

The reference in Isaiah is either to the valley of Hinnom or Gehenna, south of Jerusalem, a place where children were sacrificed by burning (NOAB, p. 1090, Hebrew Bible). This allusion provided the metaphor for a place of eternal damnation, a metaphor that many have reified. As such, hell is seen not as a valley south of Jerusalem where bodies were burned or left to rot, but a literal place of perpetual torment by fire. This metaphor, reified and perpetuated, has come to occupy a major place in Christianity.

Although Jesus declared that he was only fulfilling the law, there is more than a hint of innovation in his pronouncements. In *The Power Tactics of Jesus Christ*, Jay Haley (1969) opined that Jesus had significantly revised “the law of revenge, the procedures for giving charity, the method of prayer, and the way to fast” (p. 25). These may be less significant, though, than the idea that one should be punished for one’s thoughts as well as for one’s deeds. To wit, in Matthew, Chapter 5, verse 28, “everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (NOAB, 2001, p. 14, New Testament). Similarly, as Haley pointed out, feeling anger, as well as angry words or committing murder, would bring judgment. In this way, Jesus seemed to render a more sensitive, if not censorious version of the law.

It was, then, this Christian rendering of Hebrew law with its selective omissions, emphases, and interpretations that was to confront the pagan beliefs of the Vikings. It is well beyond the scope of the present work to consider in detail the further influence of Jesus’ followers, let alone the evolution of dogma during the first several centuries of the Christian Church. Suffice it to say that the Ten Commandments continued to lie at the core of the Christian religion.

As suggested earlier, the immense body of these religions, taken as a whole, may need to be summarized and the summaries summarized again in order that the people at large have a succinct vade mecum, at once concise and clearly understood. With caution and with appropriate understanding, we can accept the Decalogue in such role.



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If the Decalogue summarizes, admittedly, inadequately, the Christianity that confronted the Vikings, the sayings of Hár constitute the synopsis that was confronted. That is, ignoring the economic and political issues of that confrontation, great as they were, we can concentrate on the religious issues, themselves, in their highly summarized forms. With historical events laid aside, we can focus on the value systems or the axiology of the mythologies, themselves.

Whereas the Decalogue is a highly condensed statement of the Christian code of ethics, there is not as succinct a statement of the pagan code of the Norse. Rossman's (2000) *Drengskapur*, presented earlier, notwithstanding, the pagan code of the Norse has not been distilled in a manner that parallels the distillation of the Christian code. However, Rossman has offered a useful clue in the subtitle of his *Drengskapur*—"Heroic Code of the Viking Age" (p. 112). That clue leads to the recognition that heroism is a highly important, even core value in Norse mythology.

To begin, heroism can be set, at once, both in apposition and in opposition to obedience. As clearly shown, the Decalogue created a context of fidelity to one god, a jealous god who demanded absolute obedience from the people whom, he reminded them, he delivered from slavery. For dutifulness, he promised love, but for violation of his laws, the harshest of penalties. Originally, with the Hebrews, these were death and banishment. As Christianity emerged, however, a reified hell assumed the place of the harshest penalty. This contrast between heroism and obedience, may well be the key to understanding the most fundamental difference between Norse paganism and Christianity. This difference is one of core values, a contrast of axiology. Before exploring this further, however, it may be good to take a closer look at the words of Odin.

For better or for worse, as earlier noted, the sayings of Odin are not summarized in an easy-to-remember, succinct form. Most likely of Norwegian origin, "The Sayings of the High One" constitute the longest of the Eddic poems. As one might guess from the title, these sayings are for the most part didactic. Taken as a whole, they reflect what is perhaps a harshly realistic view of life. They can be divided into several sections. There are counsels, numbering not less than 79 stanzas; proverbials, or 10 stanzas of suggestions in proverb-like form; 20 stanzas of ensamples of Odin; and, the "Lay of Loddfavnir" which consists of 36 stanzas of miscellaneous counsels. As already discussed, the Rune Poem and the listing of 18 magic charms to be used in conjunction with the runes round out



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this lengthy poem. In addition to this voluminous material from “The Sayings of Hár,” there is an additional lay within *The Poetry Edda* (Hollander, 1962; Larrington, 1996), the “Lay of Sigdrifa,” in which Odin offers an additional 15 stanzas of counsel. Beyond this material, and sprinkled throughout the Eddas, Odin offers advice or warning that is embedded in the accounts of his adventures. The present focus is, however, on the assembled sayings of Odin as here identified.

There are both a negative side and a positive side to the fact that Odin’s counsels are not more concisely presented in the Eddic corpus. The negative side of this is more obvious. The positive side is that one must search through Odin’s sayings in order to extract their meaning; thereby, the import of each saying is found within its broader context and in relation to the meaning of other sayings. Interestingly, in some cases there are two or more nuggets of meaning to be found within a single stanza. When more than one piece of advice or caution appear in a single stanza, however, it is not always obvious how the two counsels are connected. Furthermore, on the basis of their content, it is not clear in some cases why a particular stanza follows another. Therefore, neither the order of the stanzas nor the order of the nuggets within a stanza should be taken as an index of their relative importance. The stanzas are not arranged in a hierarchy of significance.

One may well guess, given the size of the corpus of Odin’s counsels, that there is some degree of redundancy in his pronouncements. Upon reading Odin’s words, this becomes self-evident. Each essence in these pronouncements is restated, sometimes several times, wrapped in different words, phrases, and examples. The advantage of this is twofold. First, the sheer redundancy, in and of itself, makes it more difficult to forget, let alone miss the essence. Secondly, this redundancy, when reiterated with different wordings, phrasings, or examples, makes it more likely that at least one of the iterations will strike a chord in the recipient. Again, learning and remembering are served.

With these points in mind, we can delve into Odin’s pronouncements, themselves, beginning with his Counsels. The first is to be wary, to watch for a hidden foe in one’s hall. Immediately following this is the instruction to be a good host, to give freely to a guest, even if the visitor is a stranger. Guidance for being such includes provision of warmth, food, clothing, water for washing, and a towel, as needed by the guest. Hospitality was a cardinal value. Take note of the sort of back and forth of these two counsels

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when they are taken together. On the one hand, be wary of strangers; on the other hand, be a good and generous host! The two counsels are clear enough on one level, even if seemingly not heading in the same direction. But, on a meta-level, taken together, they bespeak another counsel—moderation. So, within four stanzas, two of which are but elaboration of how to be a good host, we are advised to *wariness*, *hospitality*, and *moderation*. Note, too, that the first two values are not absolutes and they are not static. They are dynamic and in precarious balance in terms of the meta-value of moderation. A lack of moderation would tilt the balance, and wariness could be lost in the interest of being hospitable, or the rule of hospitality could be violated by over-wariness. And, moderation, itself, can be turned upon itself. Consider moderation in moderation! Within these four stanzas, then, we are introduced to some of the complexity of the multileveled teachings of Odin. We are instructed in specifics (give your guest water and a towel, food and clothing, warmth from the cold), given counsel that is on a concrete level (wariness and hospitality), and challenged to embrace an abstract value that can be applied to multifarious contents and situations (moderation). It is just such multi-level complexity that presents itself time and again to the careful reader of the sayings of Hár.

Although dull wit may suffice at home, Odin advised a sharp wit when one is away. Odin suggested that one's wit is a far better traveling companion even than riches. A few words of explanation may be needed, here, as to the meaning of *wit*. The Anglo-Saxon word *wit* referred to *knowledge*. *Wit* in Old English meant *mind*, *understanding*, or *sense*. Traditionally, five wits were recognized. Also referred to as faculties or senses, they were common wit (common sense), estimation, fantasy, imagination, and memory. Handed down from this, we may speak of someone as having "lost his wits," or advise another "to keep her wits about her," or as "being at one's wits' end." Likewise, in modern usage, we could speak of "living by one's wits," in which case the connotation is one of craftiness or even trickery. Closely related to Old English, linguistically speaking, the Old Norse word *vit* can be translated as *sense*, *intelligence*, *understanding*, or *wit*. Following from the Old Norse, modern Icelandic has retained the word *vit*, translated as *sense* or *intelligence*. In Norwegian, *viten* means *knowledge* and the verbal form, *å vite* means *to know*. Therefore, Odin is not to be misunderstood as simply giving advice concerning verbal humor.

Returning to the five wits, in stanza 66 of the "Hávamál" there is a

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clever, and quite poetic expansion on *estimation*. In this case, it is the estimation of right timing.

Too late by far      to some feasts I came;  
                         to others, all too soon;  
the beer was drunk,      or yet unbrewed (*sic*):  
                         never hits it the hapless one right  
                         [Hollander, 1962, p. 24].

Odin's style, as shown herein, was often to couch wisdom in the form of an unpretentious or even homey example with which the reader could easily identify. This issue of timing emerges, too, in much more complex contexts than that of arrival at a feast. Laura Perls, wife of Fritz Perls and co-founder of Gestalt therapy, spoke of this in an address that was later to become a classic article published in a professional journal. "Miracles [in psychotherapy] are a result not only of intuition, but of timing" (L. Perls, 1978, p. 36). Her article highlighted the extreme importance of the right timing of therapeutic interventions. Odin's words continue to reverberate in unexpected places.

Even in the case of wit, however, it is best that moderation prevails. Odin declared that it was best to be "middling" wise. One is likely most happy when he knows only what is needful. In particular, it is better not to know one's fate beforehand. This surely would lead to a heavy heart, he suggested. Odin's words are echoed, though both inaccurately and inadequately, in the commonly held quote, "Ignorance is bliss." Ripped from its full context, this *mis*-quote is quite misleading. The actual quote, attributed to Thomas Gray, reads as follows. "Where ignorance is bliss 'Tis folly to be wise" (Evans, 1978, p. 338). Although his quote is less well known than that of Gray, Emerson, too, echoed Odin's words when he wrote, "There are many things of which a wise man might wish to be ignorant" (p. 338).

Humility was added to the list of ethical themes as Odin warned not to boast. Remember, he taught, there is always someone bolder or stronger than oneself. In contrast to the braggart, Odin suggested that the wise and the silent seldom come to grief. Remember, too, said Odin, everyone has faults.

Odin introduced a theme of self-reliance, suggesting that it is hard to be helped by the mind of another. Odin's position was that despite handicaps, one can always do something. And, it is certainly better not to beg!

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Surely a surprise to those whose view of the Vikings is based exclusively, or even primarily on popular sources, Odin warned strongly against intoxication. Not only did he caution that ale dims the wit, but he warned about ale as a traveling companion. Crapulence steals the mind, he said. This is in sharp contrast to the scene of a longhouse full of besotted Vikings, roistering as yellow-haired maidens dip drinking horns into vast vats of ale. Four consecutive stanzas of Odin's Counsels address the dangers of too much ale, concluding with the suggestion that the best part of drinking is when one's mind eventually clears! So important was this theme that Odin did not fail to return to it, conceding only to *moderation*.

Likewise, those whose impression of the Viking is that of popular culture will surely be shocked to learn that Odin extolled good grooming! Although the mention is but brief, Odin suggested that one need have no shame if one's clothes are not the best or one's steed a poor one, as long as one is washed and fed.

Lest we begin to see Odin's mien as too benign, however, it would be good to note that the theme of the warrior cult is pronounced in his counsel. He invited for consideration, for instance, that if one avoids the battle, thinking that he will be spared, old age will get him! Therefore, he exhorted to keep one's weapons close when going out, and to be bold in battle. This is the clarion call for courage. With a hint of strategy, Odin advised that one rise early if intending a sortie to take another's life or property. Likewise, if you do not trust another, speak fairly to him, but repay his treachery with lies. Revenge is implied by this. Allies are of value, for often two can conquer one. Not only is wariness necessary in one's own hall, as already mentioned, but Odin advised one to watch and listen carefully when a guest oneself. Much may be learned that could keep one safe from harm. Wariness surely is in the service of the heroic code of the warrior.

As if to offer definition, Odin outlined several aspects of the fool. The fool overeats. (Herein, is a specific violation of the principle of moderation.) Stated more poetically, do not come to the feast famished! The fool lies awake at night and ruminates. The fool thinks he knows everything, until asked a question. (Lack of humility.) The fool talks too much, and thereby reveal his ignorance. (Again, a violation of the value of moderation.) The fool does not realize that not all who laugh with him are his friends. (Lack of wariness is thus shown.) The fool is arrogant about his wealth or about his being loved. (Such reveals a lack of humility.)

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Odin offered caution where wealth is concerned. It may warp one's wit. In addition, it is, he suggested, the most unreliable of friends. Such unreliability may hint at another of Odin's counsels. Circumstances, he warned, are as fickle as the weather. This hint is one of *peripeteia*, to use the literary word for that unexpected, even abrupt reversal of fortune. Impermanence is the theme that lies beneath.

Some of Odin's statements in his Counsels beg for explanation, for they seem either simplistic or incomplete. For instance, Odin touched upon being cheerful and merry. And, he stated that a well-travelled person is a better judge of a stranger than is one who has not traveled. Odin, himself, was known for his travels, frequently going to Midgaard or to Jötenheim. Other gods, as we have seen, went as well to Svartalfheim and even to Hel. At the risk of reading too much into this, maybe this lent support to the other elements that prodded the Viking into seeking a fortune abroad.

To mock, Odin taught, was to be avoided. Not only is it best not to mock others, but one does best to avoid those who do. As a corollary, Odin warned that trouble can follow a quick tongue, not watched.

There is in Norse mythology a theme of inevitability. This is driven home clearly in the earlier discussion of orlog and the working of wyrd. Interestingly, this theme is not obviously strong in the sayings of Odin. He does imply this, however, in reminding that guests will quarrel with guests. And, at a more somber level:

Cattle die      and kinsmen die,  
                 thyself eke soon wilt die;  
one thing, I wot      will wither never:  
                 the doom over each one dead  
[Hollander, 1962, p. 25].

In Larrington's (1996) translation, more clarifying, if less poetic, the final line reads, "the reputation of each dead man" (p. 24). Once again, more than one ethical point is expressed within a single stanza. One's reputation was deemed of immense importance in the ethics of Norse mythology. And, reputation was to be won by one's own doing. It was by one's reputation that one would survive beyond death. Life is best lived without shame.

Being liked was seen as a corollary of having a good reputation. Being liked introduced the topic of friendship. The man who has friends is wealthy. It is by friends that one is cheered, and, in turn, finds happiness.

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Thus, friendship was of great value. Odin offered several pieces of advice for the nurturing of friendship. One such reminder was not to overstay one's welcome when a guest. Another was a reminder to seek out one's friends often. Friends are won, Odin instructed, by giving gifts generously. He spoke of weapons and clothing, specifically. No possession was of more value to a warrior than a sword. The meaning is surely that one should be generous with gifts of value. Still, it is important to give gifts often, even if small. Odin related that he had won a worthy friend with only half a loaf or half a cup. Odin instructed, furthermore, to be a friend to a friend's friend, but never to a friend's enemy. A false friend is known when his friendship burns hot, then soon cools. These last two sentences seem to speak of loyalty. Thus, the personal attributes that underlie friendship are generosity and loyalty. These are, then, important ethical values as taught by Odin.

Not surprisingly, Odin spoke of kin as well as friends. It is one's relatives on whom one must depend for the raising of memorial stones after one is dead. In keeping with a paternal society, Odin spoke specifically about a son in this regard. It may seem unusual that Odin said so little about relatives when blood lines were considered so important, overall, in Norse mythology.

Like the Proverbs of the Hebrew Bible before, and Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" and Nietzsche's apophthegms after, Odin's proverbials are short and pithy, and relate both advice and general truths. As for advice, choose a sword for its keenness and a girl for kissing, judge the day when it is done and ice after it is crossed, decide on a weapon after it is tried and ale after it has been drunk. The day has many eyes, so dally with girls after it is dark. Odin offered a long list of warnings, too. Beware of a bow that is brittle and a fire that is burning, a gaping wolf and a boiling kettle, a crow that is cawing and a sea that is rising, a tree without roots and a grunting sow, ice but one night old and a coiled serpent, a sick calf and a self-willed thrall, a broken blade and a house half-burned, an early sown field and a newly killed foe.

Of particular interest are Odin's warnings about women. He advised against trusting the words of a wench or the promises of a woman, for their minds, he declared are both fitful and fickle. It is as if their hearts were formed on the whirling wheel of the potter. Continuing, he warned of the bed-talk of a woman and the pleasant words of a witch. Larrington (1996) read this last warning concerning a witch as being a caution about

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a seer who offers auspicious prophesy. With a dramatic simile, Odin likened the false love of a woman to riding a horse on ice! But, before closing his warnings about women, Odin admitted that men, too, are fickle. Men, too, speak fair when their thoughts are false.

In his ensamples, written in first person, Odin confessed his misadventures with a woman whom he desired. Perhaps, then, Odin's view of women was tainted by his experience of unrequited love. He desired Billing's daughter, but was deceived. Odin's story contains his view on flattery, deception, the need for love, and the fact that no man, however wise, is immune to the lure of a maiden. The wise can be made fools by their desire.

In what seems as if a misplaced stanza, Odin returned to his statement of rules of conduct. Herein, he emphasized being cheerful at home and merry with guests, while remaining shrewd. He advised that one should speak wisely if one wishes to be thought so.

Before returning to the presentation of his counsels, Odin related the story of his winning of the poetic mead. Therein, as we saw earlier, he was more successful in his amorous escapade with Gunnlöd, Suttung's daughter. Then, in the "Lay of Loddáfáfnir" he basically added emphasis to his counsels by presenting them again with variations in the wording. This time, Odin gives counsel to Loddáfáfnir.

The first several stanzas of the lay offer seemingly random pieces of practical advice. Do not arise at night, save to ready oneself for a foe. Or, Odin conceded, to relieve oneself. Be wary of sleeping with a witch, for she will cast a spell on you, leaving you mirthless and in sorrow. Beware of sleeping with another man's wife. Be well supplied with food when you travel. Avoid sharing your misfortunes with knaves, for they will not be of kind disposition.

Even if considered heathen, the sayings of Odin may be appreciated for their more universal wisdom. In a gift shop at the Mormon immigration center in Salt Lake City, I found a decorative plate with the following words on it.

Go often to the house  
of thy friend  
for weeds choke up  
the unused path.

Attributed only to the "Scandinavian Edda," this is taken from the "Lay of Loddáfáfnir." A well-crafted paraphrasing, this captures the essence of stanza 119.

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Continuing with the theme of friendship, Odin urged the seeking of good friends and the nourishment of friendships. In keeping with this, he warned against being the first to break with a friend. Then, Odin spoke in a manner that was uncharacteristic of him, showing a surprising level of psychological understanding. He acknowledged the need to unburden one's mind, lest sorrow eat at one's soul. Not only did this show an understanding of one aspect of the importance of having good and trusted friends, but it illuminated the danger of holding on to hard-to-bear emotions. One aspect of this is the recognition of the value of what in modern psychological parlance is termed *self-disclosure*. In his now classical work, *The Transparent Self*, Sidney M. Jourard (1964) presented his pioneering research and theory concerning the relationship of self-disclosure to health and psychological well-being. The role of self-disclosure on the part of the client is, of course, now considered central to the psychotherapy process.

Even beyond this rather neutral, descriptive term, *self-disclosure*, the idea of “unburdening” one's mind suggests the psychoanalytic process of *abreaction*. This is a process of getting rid of dysphoric memories and emotions by means of expressing them, as strongly as necessary, in the presence of a trusted person. Obviously, in the case of psychoanalysis, this person is the psychoanalyst. Although first suggested by Josef Breuer, with whom Freud worked early in his career, abreaction became strongly associated with Freud and the psychoanalytic movement. Known also as *catharsis*, this process is connected with the experience, particularly of pity and terror, that was, ideally, created in the drama of ancient Greece. Under the tutelage of Thalia and Melpomene, Greek muses of comedy and tragedy, respectively, the process was one of emotional unburdening, getting rid of pent-up passions through identifying with the pathos acted out on the stage. From the Greek *katharsis*, meaning *purgation or purification*, we have inherited not only *catharsis*, but one of our medical terms for a laxative, purgative, or aperient, a *cathartic*.

Several of the body-oriented psychotherapies, following in the footsteps of Wilhelm Reich, rely heavily on catharsis. Certainly, at the extreme is the Primal Therapy of Arthur Janov (Harper, 1975). Known more colloquially as *primal scream therapy*, it involves the facilitation of the client in re-experiencing the most primal and repressed pains of childhood and expressing those pains. Although this therapy has been controversial, both in its theory and in its practice, it is noteworthy as perhaps the most radical



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example of the use of catharsis as a means of processing repressed emotions.

Returning to Odin and his advice related to the theme of friendship, he warned of bandying words with an unwise oaf and instructed that an evil man will not reward one's good. A good man, however, will praise one for one's good.

Going once again to a deeper psychological level, Odin said that true friends will speak the truth to each other. They will tell all their thoughts and not say only pleasant things. This value, *authenticity*, is a correlative of self-disclosure. Odin's sentiment is one that echoes loudly in contemporary humanistic psychology. Not surprisingly, Jourard (1964) found the term useful in his discussions of self-disclosure.

Carl Rogers, creator of Person-Centered Therapy, first called nondirective therapy and later Client-Centered Therapy, wrote extensively of authenticity on the part of the therapist. Rather than involving a set of techniques, Rogers's therapy is based on a way of being with the client. One of the core elements of this way of being is what he and his followers variously referred to as *genuineness*, *congruence*, or *therapist self-congruence*. By this, they meant that an effective therapist will express her or his true feelings about a client, to that client. The therapist will openly have whatever feeling and attitudes that she or he is having in the moment, without façade. Of course, this is to be done in an appropriately respectful manner. Citing empirical research to support them, Rogers and his colleagues maintained that therapist self-congruence is one of the core conditions that correlates positively with constructive personality change in neurotic clients (Sharf, 2004). Therapists of other schools of psychotherapy, too, have discussed authenticity. Exploring these further examples, however, will take us too far afield.

Returning to Odin's counsels, he warned not to quarrel with one's inferiors. Often, he suggested, a better man retreats, while a worse man wants to be captious and cavil.

Insightfully, Odin warned of doing things for others in situations where one may be blamed if the results are not good. By way of example, he suggested that one takes a risk by making another's arrow shafts or shoes. Crooked arrow shafts or ill-fitting shoes could well lead to bad feelings. Caution in doing things for others is, perhaps, the other side of the coin having to do with personal responsibility. Some things are best done for oneself.

Harking back to the code of the warrior, Odin encouraged one to let

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it be known if wronged by another. Then, he said, fall on one's foe without hesitation! Revenge condoned, wrongs are to be righted according to Odin's code.

Avoid evil deeds, declared Odin. Simply stated, do good.

Then, back to the lore of battle. While fighting, Odin said not to look up, for then one may become mad with fear. Keep focused, lest one be bewitched by warlocks.

Odin advised on how to win the love of a good woman. The key that he revealed was to make pledges and to keep them. Be true to one's word.

Once again, Odin called for caution. This time, caution about ale, about another's wife, and about being outwitted by thieves. However, moderation is again evoked as Odin warns of being overly wary.

Mock neither guest nor wanderer. In reiterating this advice, Odin addressed the old in particular, reminding that the aged, too, may have something worthwhile to say. Furthermore, no man is without worth, no man flawless. Inside the breast of every man, Odin declared, are blended both fowl and fair. So drive no guest away. Not even the indigent. Yet, be wary of being too generous or overly hospitable. The theme of moderation in behavior is brought up, once more.

Perhaps the most enigmatic of all of Odin's pronouncements is the following. Paraphrased, it says that when you drink ale, invoke earth-strength. Several folk-medicinal remedies follow this. Scholars have been more than a little perplexed by these several lines. However, Odin's pronouncement concerning the invocation of the power of the earth may bring to mind the earlier discussion of bioenergetics. Recall that Lowen and Pierakos suggested a revision of Reich's energy-based theory of personality to include the concept of *grounding*. Their bioenergetics model defined psychological functioning in terms of three dynamic elements, namely *charge*, *ground*, and *discharge*. Charge refers to the generation of energy. Ground means the ability to contain or tolerate that charge of energy. Discharge, of course, is the release of the built-up charge of energy through muscular action. To repeat from the earlier discussion, Lowen (1975) explained grounding as follows:

In the human personality the buildup of charge could ... be dangerous ... if the person were not grounded. The individual could split off, become hysterical, experience anxiety or go into a slump ... the more a person can feel his contact with the ground, the more he can hold his ground, the more charge he can tolerate and the more feeling he can handle [p. 196].

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One may glean, perhaps, that this idea of grounding has actual roots in classical mythology. Consider the following. While searching for the garden of the Hesperides, where golden apples grew, Hercules came across Antaeus, a giant who was an extraordinary wrestler. Antaeus demanded that strangers who came upon him must wrestle with him, their death being the price for losing. With their skulls, he was adorning a temple. As Hercules and Antaeus wrestled, Hercules found that although he could throw his opponent to the ground quite easily, Antaeus arose each time with renewed strength. Antaeus, unbeknownst to Hercules, was the son of Gaea (Earth), and each time that he touched Mother Earth, she renewed his strength. When he recognized that Antaeus grew stronger each time he was thrown, Hercules lifted Antaeus up and held him in the air. With that, he was able to strangle Antaeus (Sabin, 1940).

As we have seen, Earth (Jörd, Iord) was recounted in Norse mythology, as well. In his *Prose Edda*, Snorri related that Earth was reckoned among the goddesses. Her mother was Night. She was Odin's daughter and his wife, and thereby the mother of Thor and a rival of Frigg (Sturluson, 1954, 1987). So, does Thor's strength derive from his mother, Earth, as does that of Antaeus? And, does Odin's pronouncement concerning earth-strength have, then, a sort of kinship with the story of Hercules and Antaeus? Importantly, does bioenergetics theory lend a modicum of understanding to Odin's pronouncement? Incredible, perhaps; intriguing, surely.

As far as Odin's counsels are concerned, "The Lay of Sigrdrifa" offered more emphasis through repetition. Loyalty was touted, once more, for kin should be held blameless and revenge against them should not be taken. Ill to the breaker of an oath; if an oath is sworn, it should be upheld. Speak truly, and do not throw words about casually with fools. Bald and simple, do not be the guest of a witch. Watch out for such hags during battle, for they may dull both wit and weapon. Too, do not be lured by temptresses, nor let your sleep be disturbed by them. Sobriety was once again a focus as Odin warned that quarrels and ale often bring sorrow. Therefore, do not quarrel, if drunk, and do not quarrel with those who are.

Turning to the code of the hero, both wits and weapons are needed. Self-defense was encouraged, obviously, for it is better to fight than to be burned alive in one's hall. Be wary, too, for the oath of an outlaw's son is not to be trusted.

Respect for the dead was reflected in Odin's instructions for a corpse

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to be washed and dried, its hair combed and, then, for it to be placed in a coffin.

Odin opposed both rape and adultery, as revealed in his advice not to mar a maiden or to lure a married woman. Best, perhaps, to avoid an angry father or a vengeful husband.

Having perused the array of Odin's counsels, proverbials, and ensamples, it should be apparent that some sort of outline would be useful, if not necessary. Clearly, some of the values that Odin proclaimed can be regarded as subordinate to broader or higher values. In other words, superordinate values can be recognized that are more of a categorical nature, and under these a number of specific gems of advice can be arranged. These latter nuggets appear sometimes as *personal qualities* and sometimes as *behaviors*. The task of organizing and summarizing Odin's advice is made more challenging because of this. Likely, too, disagreement among those who attempt such arranging would not be inconsiderable! Nonetheless, this task is essential if one is to consider the pagan ethical code *vis-a-vis* the Decalogue.

Whether identified as a code of values, a code of ethics, or a code of behavior, it is clear that Odin's code is a heroic code. This conclusion is made explicit both in Odin's pronouncements—be they counsels, proverbials, or ensamples—and the mythical stories, themselves. *The ethical code of Norse paganism is a heroic code, one made distinct by virtue of the particular array of subordinate behaviors, personal qualities and values touted by Odin.* It seems accurate, then, to say that the overarching category of Norse pagan values is *heroism*.

Beneath the overarching rubric of heroism, we can easily discern the following warrior qualities: *courageousness; revengefulness; self-reliance; wariness; and sharp wit*. Shifting from the nominative to the adjectival forms, we then can characterize the mythical hero as *courageous, revengeful, self-reliant, wary, and sharp witted*. Subsumed under courage are behaviors such as boldness in battle. Revenge is a hero's duty when an enemy does wrong to one or to one's kin; one must quickly fall upon one's enemy. Self-reliant, the warrior would not depend overly on the advice of others, but would think for himself. And he would craft his own arrows, literally and metaphorically. As for wariness, one must watch out for the enemy hiding in one's hall, a thief, the son of a wolf, and always, a witch. Keeping one's weapons close while away also reflects the warrior's wariness. As with his weapons, the warrior would keep his wit sharp. The

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reader may wish to review the pronouncements discussed above, looking for the many examples of these warrior-like values-cum-behaviors.

The above items are primary; they both define the values of the warrior and prescribe his or her behavior. As such, they are, in a sense, hard, tough, and demanding. This seems to be as it should, for these are the signposts on the path to Valhalla.

Subordinate to these are quite a number of non-warrior-like values, qualities, and behaviors. They tend to be softer, more tender, and less demanding. For the most part, and in most instances, these may be over-ridden by the warrior-like items. In other words, for the mythical hero, warrior qualities mostly trump non-warrior-like qualities when there is a conflict between them.

Turning, now, to the several non-warrior qualities that are nonetheless part of the Norse heroic code, we can list the following. Once again, the reader is invited to relate these back to Odin's pronouncements discussed above, as well as the above-mentioned myths, themselves. In doing so, one may note how much each one seems to be emphasized as reflected in the number of times it is touted.

Looking, again, both to the adjectival form of the personal quality, as well as the nominal form of the value, itself, we can consider the following:

*Cheerfulness.* The hero tries to be cheerful. This is a prime example of a personal quality that would be trumped by warrior-like qualities when, for instance, in battle.

*Generosity.* Best for the hero to be generous in order to win friends and to nurture friendships. Kin, too, should be included in one's generosity. Gifts need not be large, but not infrequent.

*Grooming.* The hero may not have much of material value, but should be well-groomed when going out into the world. This seems a rather minor item given that Odin did not mention it over and over again as was the case with other items. It certainly would give way to warrior activity quite easily!

*Hospitality.* The hero should be hospitable, not turning away a traveler, let alone a friend. Interestingly, hospitality was emphasized by Odin.

*Humility.* To be humble seems in contradiction to being bold, but only under circumstances of warrior activity. Boasting should be eschewed.

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*Loyalty.* Like being hospitable, Odin emphasized the personal quality of being loyal. Loyalty applied to both friends and kin.

*Moderation.* In this case, if moderation is the value, self-control is the corresponding personal quality. Self-control is needed in the case of food, but even more so in the case of ale. Crapulence is to be avoided. It seems, however, that this guideline was skirted, now and then, even by the gods.

*Reputation.* Being of good repute was also highly valued. This is an interesting item in that reputation would result from exhibiting the other qualities, both warrior and non-warrior.

*Respect.* Odin advised one to be respectful. He was quick to include the elderly, the indigent, and even corpses in this.

*Truthfulness.* Being truthful could be negated in the face of warrior values, of course. A wary and sharp-witted warrior seeking revenge against an enemy would certainly not eschew words of deception. Aside from situations of conflict, however, keeping one's word was highly valued.

One of the difficulties that may be apparent in the above listing of secondary values is that of interaction or interdependence among them. That is, they are not all orthogonal to one another. For example, although generosity is not limited to the arena of hospitality, it is an aspect of it. Furthermore, as already noted, reputation depended on the display of some combination of the other values. Of the several secondary values, generosity; hospitality; loyalty; moderation or self-control concerning food, and especially ale; and reputation seem perhaps the strongest. It should be kept in mind, however, that the values taken as a whole form a gestalt. All of the values, both warrior-like and non-warrior-like, taken together constitute what we can recognize as a particular heroic code.

In addition to the heroic code, itself, Odin's gems of advice for living well are worth considering, again. These, perhaps, can be understood as aspects of wit. So, to wit. Arise early, and do not lie awake at night ruminating. Live without shame. If sharing a secret, share it with no more than one other. Things often go worse than expected, so do not be taken off guard if this happens.

With regard to love, or more accurately, perhaps, lust. Better not to seduce either virgin or another man's wife. This is at once wise and pragmatic! Be careful not to be lured by a temptress, or to lose sleep over one.

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Even the wise can be made foolish by the lure of love. This Odinic wisdom resounds in modern Norwegian language. Whereas the verb *å dære* means *to infatuate*, the noun *dære* means *fool*. Moreover, *dårlig* means *sick*, and *dårskap* means *folly*.

In comparing the Decalogue and the pagan heroic code, several features stand out. First, foremost, and most obviously, the Decalogue is based on *obedience* as the overarching value, whereas the pagan code is based on *heroism*. Obedience under a covenant with one god, versus heroism in the presence of several gods and goddesses. With a short list of proscriptions, obedience is defined. With a long presentation of counsels, heroism is limned, its features surveyed. The Decalogue is absolute, while Odin's counsels are more relative and pragmatic. As we have seen, Odin included a great deal of practical advice.

A tribal mentality was invoked through the establishment of the Covenant. Within the first of the Ten Commandments, the god of the Covenant identified his people as those whom he had delivered from slavery. In return, he demanded to be worshipped exclusively. A basically tribal mentality maintained as it evolved into a strong Christian in-group and non-Christian out-group distinction, bolstered by the shared belief of worship of the one true god.

Let us look at the heroic code in comparison with each of the Ten Commandments, in turn. In the first, a jealous god demanded that the people shall not have any other god. In contrast to such exclusivity, Norse mythology has many gods *and* goddesses. It is inclusive, in this sense.

Second is that the people shall not make idols and shall not bow down to such. Far from imageless worship, Norse religious practice employed idols extensively. From small idols, cast or carved, suitable for a home shrine, to large idols for the temples devoted to them, idols were common. Sacrifices were made in their presence and prayers offered to them.

The third commandment is that one shall not make wrongful use of the name of god. Odin's pronouncement concerning keeping one's word is perhaps relevant, here. Although Odin did not proscribe swearing by a god, he did tout being true to what one has vowed. In addition, the gods could be invoked in magic and in divination.

Fourth, one shall not work on the Sabbath day. This is to be a day of rest. Although the calendar of the Vikings was replete with feasts, no equivalent of the Sabbath was designated by Odin. Nor did Odin, in his counsels, speak of any requirement to observe the feasts.



## 7. *The Wisdom of Odin*

The fifth commandment is to honor one's father and one's mother. This commandment contained a contingency. One should honor one's father and mother, so that one would live long in the land given by god. Odin spoke of loyalty and generosity to family, as we have seen, but no contingency was attached.

The following five commandments are stated clearly and baldly as "shall nots." Commandment six regards murder. Seven mentions adultery. Eight is about stealing. Nine regards bearing false witness against one's neighbor. The tenth is with respect to coveting. In the case of coveting, several specific instances were designated. These were one's neighbor's house, wife, male or female slaves, ox, donkey, or anything else belonging to your neighbor.

Odin, it seems, was little concerned about murder or stealing, *per se*. These were offenses that carried civil penalty in Viking society. One could be fined, banished, or even put to death for such, but they were not proscribed on religious grounds. To kill someone or steal from one would likely result in that person's family seeking revenge. For the warrior, the ethical values of boldness and especially of just revenge seem to override any concern about murder or stealing. Within the mythical world, Odin, and especially Thor showed no compunction about killing, as long as the killing was of someone determined to be an enemy.

Likewise, Odin touted keeping one's word, but certainly championed the lie that was strategically used by a wary and sharp-witted warrior. Ever pragmatic, coveting, again, was not of direct concern to Odin. It would be ill-advised, of course, if it caused one to lie awake and ruminate.

Adultery, as we have seen, was advised against by Odin. But, again, this was practical advice and not a religious prohibition. Recall that the gods and goddesses were not, themselves, ill-disposed to adultery or even incest.

Although not a part of the Decalogue, itself, the Christianity that confronted the pagan faith included something most foreign—Hell. As we have seen, the Christian Hell was much different from either Niflheim or the Hel of Norse mythology. Christian Hell was presented as a place of punishment for those who broke the commandments, originally dictated to Moses by the Hebrew god, and therefore constituting the basic covenant with their god. Niflheim or Hel were, of course, destinations more determined by orlog, that is, the working of *wyrd* rather than violation of interdicts dictated by a god.

We see, then, that the heroic code of Norse mythology did not stipulate



## The Echo of Odin

a set of rules the violation of which would invoke the eternal wrath of a god jealous for exclusivity. There was no covenant between a god or gods and humans, but an inexorable confirmation of orlog through the working of *wyrd*. No exclusive god, but many. Each god or goddess ruled over his or her own domain, a domain both of influence and of cosmography. A plentiful array of idols representing Odin, Thor, Frey, and other gods and goddesses. No imageless worship required. An emphatic oath could be taken on the name of any one of them, as long as one's word was kept. No weekly day with work set aside to honor the one god. No absolute rules that could not be broken in the interest of courageous heroism. Still, the gods were not to be taken too lightly. When thunder sounded, propitiatory prayer to Thor; a prayer to Njord if on an angry sea.

Perhaps, the use of analogy would be a good form of summary. The power of the analogy derives from its lying somewhere between expository prose on the one hand and metaphor on the other. The analogy is, too, akin to the riddle in that there may be a moment of recognition that does not always come immediately upon reading it. Analogies are best read unhurriedly. Layers and aspects of meaning may emerge if one is patient and allows oneself to linger with the analogy, turning it over in one's mind. Consider, then, the following:

The Heroic Code : Norse Paganism : : The Covenant : Christianity

Courageous Heroism : Norse Paganism : : "Child-like" Obedience :  
Christianity

The use of "Child-like" should not be taken in a derogatory sense. Rather, it is a direct reflection of the wording chosen by Jesus in teaching his followers how to pray. Although it is found in Luke, the better known version of his exemplary prayer is that which appears in Matthew, Chapter 6, verse 9. Well known to Christians as the Lord's Prayer, it begins, of course, with "Our Father in heaven" (*NOAB*, 2001, p. 15, New Testament). It is also known, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church, by the Latin *paternoster*, meaning "our father."

Sayings of Hár : Norse Paganism : : The Decalogue : Christianity

Polytheism : Norse Paganism : : Monotheism : Christianity

"Individual" Inclusivity : Norse Paganism : : "Tribal" Exclusivity :  
Christianity

## 7. *The Wisdom of Odin*

Gods, giants and humans : Norse Paganism : : God and humans :  
Christianity

Through marriage, theft, domination, or violence, the gods were most often busy with keeping the giants at bay. They would, however, turn their attention to humans when humans showed disrespect by failing to recognize the power of the gods. Likewise, when humans failed to uphold the ethic of hospitality. As expressed by Larrington (2002, p. 74), “Where universal custom—the rule of hospitality and respect for the gods—is breached, the god manifests himself terrifyingly in the human world.” It seems, then, that both Norse paganism and its same period Christianity strongly suggested that one maintain a healthy fear of the god or gods that one worshipped. Such fear was, in both cases, based firmly in the respective mythologies.

Beyond the mutually held fear, however, there is a finely nuanced difference between falling short of the aspirational ethic of Norse paganism and that of Christianity. This difference derives from the contrast of the heroic code and the code of the covenant, more specifically, heroism versus obedience. *Failed heroism becomes disgrace; failed obedience becomes guilt.*

Both disgrace and guilt constitute shame, of course. But, do not let this stigma that they hold in common blur the subtle yet important distinction between them. Violation of the code of obedience is more likely to usher in guilt. Violation of the code of heroism, on the other hand, more likely invites disgrace. Remember, it was by reputation, itself, that the Norse pagan hoped to survive mortality, an aspiration bolstered by the code of heroism.

If contemplated, perhaps the following analogy will serve a heuristic function.

Disgrace : Norse Paganism : : Guilt : Christianity

## Conclusion

If the heroic code of Norse paganism represents a philosophical level of discourse, then the nine worlds of consciousness represents the psychological level. In their mythology, the Norse have given us not just a cosmography, but a rich and nuanced metaphor for human consciousness. It is, so to speak, a landscape of the soul. As a map of consciousness, then, one can identify a modal type of consciousness for each particular world. These modal types can be templates for the description of our own consciousness or that of those around us. Thus, we might recognize that someone seems hypomanic or heatedly overcharged, as if driven by the fires of Muspelheim, or as lacking in consciousness as a guest of Hel, or as coldly lethargic and lacking in aliveness as someone in Niflheim. Or a person may be seen to be as lustful or as greedy, as cunning or guileful as a denizen of Svartalfheim, or as oafish and fomenting of chaos and destruction as one from Jötenheim. There is, then, the mundane focus of Midgard. Likewise, the courage of a warrior god or goddess, the fecundity of imagination of a fertility god or goddess, or that elusive higher consciousness befitting a light elf from Alfheim. Being conversant with the full mode of consciousness of each of the nine worlds allows one potentially to recognize such in one's self or in others.

Beyond the complete comprehension of each of the nine worlds in terms of a level or mode of consciousness, one can consider them through a finer grain analysis, as well. In other words, with each sentient being of the entire cosmography, we often can see a general level of consciousness that is shared with all who belong to that particular world. In addition, there are sometimes qualities that are unusual or even uniquely attributed to a particular figure. Perhaps this is reflected by appearance, as when we find among the ugly giants, the occasional beautiful giantess. And, thrall-like, karl-like, and jarl-like awareness

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may be noted, nuances of the sublunary consciousness of the dwellers of Midgaard.

Attention to individuals within a given world is especially of value in the gleaning of understanding of consciousness from the highly nuanced gods and goddesses. With them, in particular, we find various, specific elements of consciousness introduced or emphasized. The wisdom of the polymathic Kvasir, the settling of legal disputes by Forseti, Syn's commitment to truth and justice. Bragi's eloquence with words, Sjöfn's understanding of the evocation of love, the prudence and self-control of Snotra. The list is long and may be studied by reviewing the earlier discussion of the individual gods and goddesses and their personal realms of activity. In doing so, note both positive and negative possibilities. For example, for both fearlessness and impulsivity, Thor is emblematic.

Among the gods, we sometimes find attributes and behaviors that are shocking to anyone who holds a narrow, New Testament view of how a god should act. These gods of Norse mythology would perhaps be more simpatico with the God of the Old Testament than with the newer one. Raging anger, vengefulness, and jealousy were not uncommon. Norse gods and goddesses exhibit very human-like behavior, including sexual promiscuity, adultery, and even incest, vindictiveness, cruelty, impulsivity, deception, and thievery. Just look at Frey and Freyja, Thor, and even Odin. In fact, Balder stands out as a rare example of a good god. Gods may give favors, but they may also act in unseemly ways. This is but symptomatic of their complexity.

As previously stated, the variety and complexity of the beings at each level of the three-tier cosmos increase as we move up the world tree from the lower worlds to the middle worlds and on to the upper worlds of gods and goddesses. This trend reaches its culmination most particularly in Odin. Odin, again, is the paragon of the multifaceted god. Although some of his attributes are shared with other gods, he combines these in a unique and complex way. Consider, for instance, some of his many hypostases, as reflected in a sample of his more than fifty names:

Allföd (All-father);  
Valfather (Father-of-the-dead);  
Hangagud (God-of-the-hanged);  
Haptagud (God-of-the-gods);  
Farmagud (God-of-cargoes);  
Grím (Masked One);  
Herjan (Raider);

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Hjálmbéri (Helmeted One);  
Thekk (Pleasant One);  
Thud (Thin One);  
Helblindi (One-who-blinds with death);  
Hár (High One);  
Svipal (Changeable One);  
Sanngetall (One-who-guesses-right);  
Hnikar ([Spear-]thruster);  
Bileyg (One-whose-eye-deceives-him [one-eyed]);  
Bölverk (Worker-of-evil);  
Fjölsvid (Very-wise One);  
Sidskegg (Long-bearded One)  
Óski (Fulfiller-of-desire);  
Hárbard (Grey-bearded One);  
Ygg (Terrible One);  
Vak (Alert One);  
Veratyr (God-of-men)  
[Sturluson, 1954, pp. 48–49].

While many of these epithets are self-revelatory, some hold less obvious meaning. Edred Thorsson (1988b), in a highly thought provoking article titled “The Way of Woden,” elucidated the major concerns of Odin. His view apparently evolved from that of Einar Haugen. Haugen, according to Thorsson, described Odin’s three major concerns as those of *death*, *war*, and *sex as fun*. The mysteries of magic and transformation were subsumed under the heading of death. Thorsson went beyond Haugen by expanding the former’s work and defining four Odinic concerns. First, is *wisdom and magic*, under which Thorsson included death. Second is *war and defense*, including both war-like and royal aspects. *Management* is the third of Odin’s concerns, meaning the putting in order of gods, humans, and nature itself. Fourth is *sex*, but in a broader sense. Sex, as an Odinic concern, is for Thorsson inclusive of sex for pleasure, but also sex for procreation. Recall, here, Odin’s role in the creation of gods, demigods, and humans. Consider, too, that in “Hávamál” or “The Sayings of Hár” in *The Poetic Edda* (Hollander, 1962), Odin offered more than fifteen pieces of advice concerning love and sex. Furthermore, two of the eighteen runes that he claimed to have learned are concerned with bewitching a woman and keeping her true, respectively. Thorsson’s arrangement of Odin’s activities, as revealed in the myths, into four arenas of concern is surely clarifying. While elucidating as it does, some of the more esoteric of Odin’s epithets come into focus.

In considering the symbolic value of the gods and goddesses in under-

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standing human consciousness, we can profit from the work of Toni Wolff. An analyst who was mentored by Jung, she recognized a polarity between the well-known Great Mother and Love Goddess figures. This polarity seemed to her to be transected by another polarity, which she identified with the Amazon and the Medium figures. Thereby, Wolff identified four, major, female archetypes, the *Mother*, the *Hetaira* or *Love Goddess*, the *Amazon*, and the *Medium* (Stevens, 1999). Here, some degree of explanation is in order. The Mother is focused with instinctual and conventional attention to domestic matters such as creating a home, gestation, nurturance, and the rearing of children. At quite the opposite pole, the Hetaira is concerned first and foremost with her love life. Independence, self-sufficiency, and ambition characterize the Amazon; she tends to be impersonal and objective. Finally, the Medium is in touch with the collective unconscious and is immersed in her subjective experience. This lends her intuitive understanding.

If these are, indeed, major, female archetypes, we would predict that they are represented in Norse mythology. And, this is precisely what we find. The nourishing Mother can be recognized in Earth, herself, the mother of Thor. And Frigg, too, is the Mother, judging by her behavior in protecting her son, Balder. As for the Hetaira, Freyja is surely emblematic. Her dalliances are widely-known and many, and extend even to her brother. Next, the Amazon. Skadi well represents this archetype as she lives alone in the mountains, skiing and hunting with bow and arrow. Finally, Vör seems a good candidate to represent the Medium. Recall, nothing can be concealed from her, in addition to which, awareness, itself, is associated with her.

Following the work of Toni Wolfe, Edward Whitmont looked for the four, major, archetypes that identify masculinity. The terms that he elected were *The Father*, *The Son*, *The Hero*, and *The Wise Man* (Stevens, 1999). In their extension of Whitmont's work, Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette (Moore & Gillette, 1991) decided upon these respective but more exotic terms: *King*, *Lover*, *Warrior*, and *Magician*. Earlier, by way of identifying three aspects of the Æsir, I indicated candidates for three of these four archetypes, using terms slightly different from those of Moore and Gillette. Transferring these Æsir figures, now, Tyr embodies the King, Thor the Warrior, and Odin the Magician archetypes. The Lover may be embodied by the addition of the Vanir god, Frey. The romantic love myth, "The Lay of Skirnir" or "Skirnismál" in *The Poetic Edda*, presents us with a lovesick

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Frey, and may actually dramatize the rites of a Frey cult in which Frey's annual union with the fertility goddess is celebrated (Hollander, 1962). Reminiscent of the polarities of the four female archetypes presented above, we can recognize the polarities of King and Lover, and that of Warrior and Magician within the male archetypes. Once again, these form two dimensions, intersecting at a right angle.

Utilizing the archetypes identified and discussed by Wolff and by Moore and Gillette, we can look at an individual in terms of how he or she embodies each of these archetypal dimensions. Where is the person, if a woman, on the Mother-Hetaira dimension and where on the dimension of the Amazon and the Medium? If a man, where on the King-Lover and where on that of the Warrior-Magician? In keeping with Jungian theory, any imbalance in consciousness is compensated in the unconscious, a process that Jung referred to as *enantiodromia*. That is, extreme position on one of these dimensions would constitute an imbalance and alert the psyche to the need for balance. Using this principle, we could hypothesize that if one of the four archetypes appears extreme in its manifestation, it will be compensated by its opposite in the unconscious. We would do well to look for this compensatory manifestation in the person's dreams, fantasies, or artistic productions.

The idea of a personality dominated by one of the above-named archetypes brings up the topic of typologies, a subject matter touched upon earlier. A psychological typology is an optional template that can be used to categorize particular behaviors, or the underlying dynamics that are believed to be responsible for those behaviors. The purpose of a typology is to simplify by means of reducing behaviors or causes to a limited number of categories. In order not to be overwhelmed by the complexity of behavior, a typological template manages these data, helping to make them more easily comprehended. Simply put, a typology is means of data reduction.

Many psychological typologies are based on dichotomies. These are found within the complex theories of psychologists as well as in the so-called *implicit personality theories* of lay persons. An example of the former is the dichotomy of introversion and extraversion, the two *attitudes* or *orientations* that are found within Jung's theory of personality. Sometimes, a personality dichotomy, especially one stemming from an implicit personality theory, is sufficiently appealing that it is admitted into the corpus of folklore. Often times, this is accompanied by a dash of humor. For

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example, "There are two kinds of people in the world, those who jump into the water and those who ease into it gradually." This dichotomy may seem true, intuitively, and it definitely has a folksy appeal. In addition, as a metaphor, it lends itself to application in many situations.

Once a person is located in this dichotomous typology, three scientific functions may appear to be served: description, understanding, and prediction! The description step may be sound, if based on repeated observations of that person. Predictive validity of the typology can likewise be tested by observing the person's behavior in other situations. That is, does that person tend to "jump into" things in other arenas, or to "ease into" other situations.

The topic of understanding, however, is trickier. The danger, here, is one of circular explanation. The pitfall would be as follows: He consistently jumps in. Therefore, he is a jumping-in type. Why does he jump in? Because he is a jumping-in type. How do we know he is a jumping in type? Because he consistently jumps in. And so on, ad nauseam. The functions of description and prediction may proceed simply from careful observation. Understanding, however, requires something more, some underlying theory as to cause or dynamics that goes beyond the behavior that defines the typology. Understanding begs a broader context; it is at a different level of discourse. We might understand the above behavior in terms of a particular chronic level of activity of the person's reticular activating system (RAS). That, in turn, may be understood as resulting from a genetic predisposition. Or, the behavior may be understood in terms of a known childhood learning history. These two possible explanations are, of course, not mutually exclusive. As we know, ease and rate of learning are influenced strongly by the level of activity of the RAS. Then, once in place, actual understanding can greatly increase the range and accuracy of possible predictions.

Within the confines of a typology, and based on the resemblance of a person's behavior to that of the denizens of a particular mythical world, or more specifically, a specific figure from that world, we can type that person. For example, when demonstrating the dwarfish characteristics identified and elaborated earlier, a person may be said to be manifesting the consciousness of a dark elf. Most succinctly, the dark elf type would be lustful and greedy, and given to cunning and guile. One could refer to this person as a dark elf or dwarf type.

If the strength of a typology lies in its definition of a limited number



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of relevant categories and therefore the reduction of an overwhelming amount of data, then its weakness can be found here, as well. In other words, the act of defining certain categories at the same time defines away all other categories. Invoking the template of a typology screens out all other data as being irrelevant.

We can, however, go beyond a simple dichotomous typology. Returning to the work of Wolff, she recognized two orthogonal dimensions defined by the archetypes of Mother and Hetaira and by the Amazon and the Medium, respectively. Drawing a circle to enclose the four archetypal figures, we have four sectors, then, in which to locate a given person. The implication is that a given woman may be represented somewhere between the Mother and the Hetaira in terms of the relative strength of the manifestation of those archetypes in her personality. At the same time, and in the same manner, she may be placed on the dimension defined by the Amazon and the Medium. Thus, she may be placed in terms of an admixture of types of consciousness.

In considering the types of consciousness suggested by Norse cosmography, it should be apparent that they are, for the most part, not arranged in rigid or exact dichotomies. Having the potential of all of the forms of consciousness within one, different types may dominate at any given time. As we look, then, to which forms of consciousness are manifest by a person, we can do this with regard to the present moment, or in terms of what may be in a more chronic sense characteristic of the person. Even where oppositions are found—Muspell (fire) and Niflheim (ice), or Jötunheim (chaos) and Asgaard (stanching chaos)—it is best to recognize them as being extreme points on a continuum, allowing for placement anywhere between the antipodes.

To reiterate, each type of consciousness represented by the nine worlds, and further nuanced by specific figures occupying those worlds, is potential in each person. One way of conceiving of this is in terms of force fields. Each of the nine worlds can be thought of as a vortex of energy. Within a person, we can then speak of the relative strength of these vortices and their interactions, one upon the other.

Although of the post-Viking era, there is an old folk belief in a powerful eddy west of Norway, in the Arctic Ocean, called the *maelstrom*. Its power is, perhaps, better captured by its other name; in Swedish it is the *håxkittel* or *witch's kettle*. In spite of the risk of stacking one metaphor upon another, I suggest that the maelstrom may be taken as a symbol for

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each of the nine worlds, as each, in turn, symbolizes a particular consciousness. Hopefully useful, and certainly graphic, the metaphor of the maelstrom suggests that each of the nine worlds may draw one powerfully into its influence. Pulled in, one's thoughts, feelings, and tendencies to action are joined together by the force of the eddy. Escape and recapture of consciousness comes if and when another maelstrom is ascendant in strength. The further question concerns the extent to which one chooses or is able to resist the force of a given maelstrom-cum-world of consciousness.

Earlier, it was suggested that the Norse gods and goddesses are not necessarily to be emulated. Part and parcel of their frequent complexities, their good qualities often are accompanied by some not so good qualities. Vulgarly stated, although Thor would be good to have on your side in a bar brawl, it is also he who likely would have fomented it! There are, of course, exceptions. Most notable, perhaps, is that of Balder who symbolizes personal beauty and goodness, wisdom and mercy, firmness of judgment and strength of character. Also, the peace and prosperity that Frey represents, the courage and knowledgeability of Tyr, the eloquence of Bragi, and Forseti's fairness in the settling of legal disputes are particular qualities that are surely worthy of aspiration. Although their personal qualities are but limned incompletely in the myths, there are several goddesses characterized by admirable qualities. Outstanding, in this regard, are the gentleness of Lofn, the wisdom, self-control and gentle manner of Snotra, and Vör's combination of wisdom and a searching mind.

There is a very interesting modern phenomenon that could be seen not as an intentional emulation but as a reflection of a worthy aspect of Heimdall. This reflection can be attributed only to the manifestation of the unconscious archetype which is embodied by him. His aspect as progenitor of the races of humankind is not included in any such mirroring. It is his sensory acuity in his role as warder of the gods that seems to be reflected. Recall that Heimdall had extremely keen senses, so much so that he could see a hundred leagues by day or by night and hear grass growing, as well as the growing of the wool on sheep. The modern case is something called *Sensory Awareness*. With roots in the work of Else Gindler in Germany, it was instituted in the United States by Charlotte Selver around 1938. In the 1940s, several New York psychoanalysts studied with her, among them and now well-remembered, Erich Fromm, Clara Thompson, and the co-founder of Gestalt therapy, Frederick "Fritz" Perls.

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The first experiential workshop on Sensory Awareness was offered by Selver and her husband, Charles Brooks, at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California in the fall of 1963. Since then, the work has spread widely, with workshop leaders in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and parts of Europe. The work of Selver and Brooks has been endorsed by many well-known figures such as Zen Master, Suzuki-roshi; Alan Watts, interpreter of Zen for the United States public; and Michael Murphy, co-founder of Esalen Institute. In 1974, Brooks published *Sensory Awareness*, the first and still major book on the topic (Brooks, 1974). Sensory Awareness is not a technique, but a practice; “the aim is not the acquisition of skills but to allow us the freedom to explore living sensitively, and to learn from that exploration” (inside dust cover). Otherwise stated, “the aim of this work is to reacquaint us with the innate perceptive capacities which we have so often lost in becoming adults, the approaches used require patient exploration by the student in an atmosphere of inner quiet” (Brooks, 1974, promotional flyer).

In the mythical world where Heimdall lives, it is the giants, of course, who bring forth destructive chaos. It is through his most acute sensory awareness that he may detect the coming of the thurses as they make their way from Jötunheim. Thus warned, the gods may mobilize and hopefully stanch the flow of chaos. Many pundits of human well-being point out the chaotic nature of the modern world where we live, and decry its destructive effects. By practicing the awakening of the senses, natural and unedited, the chaos of the mind can be quieted. Such is the credo of Sensory Awareness as I understand it. The destructive effects of an all-too-busy mind may be held at bay through raw, unhampered seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting. Such is the practice of Sensory Awareness as I have experienced it. Heimdall, warder of the gods, warns of chaos approaching, as he is equipped by his senses to do. Fritz Perls admonishes with his Gestalt therapy catchphrase, “Lose your mind and come to your senses!”

Surely, Ragnarök is the quintessence of chaos and destruction. Snorri’s description is both startling and frightening. As earlier noted, Ragnarök will be ushered in by three winters of war, followed by three winters of hard frosts and biting winds, driven snow, with no summers between. The latter three winters surely mean crop failure and resulting famine. During the wars, brothers will kill one another, siblings will engage in incest, and adultery will be rampant. War and the rending of the fabric

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of civilized society. With highly poetic imagery, Snorri describes the wolf swallowing the sun, another seizing the moon, and the stars disappearing. Mountains will tremble, and the sea turn violent. Surt's fire will send smoke and leaping flames to the heavens. Thus, the heavens, themselves, turn dark as earthquakes shake the world and volcanos erupt. The major gods will perish, as we have seen, for this is Ragnarök, The Twilight of the Gods (Sturluson, 1954).

In the kind of paradox found perhaps only in mythology, Ragnarök spells perdition, and yet, another cycle will begin. The cycle of arising, being, and passing away is assured. From the coming together of ice and fire from Niflheim and Muspelheim, to the gradual gnawing away of the roots of Yggdrasill, to the cataclysm of Ragnarök, at once both environmental and military. But, then, the beginning of a new cycle. As we know, Odin's sons Vidar and Váli will survive and undertake a reestablishment of the cosmos. The earth will rise from the sea. The sons of Thor, Modi, and Magni will join Vidar and Váli in Idavöll, where once there was Asgaard. Balder and Höd will return from Hel. Two human beings hidden in *Hoddmirmir's Wood*, too, will survive. They are *Lif* and *Lifthrasir*. It is they who will repopulate the world.

The dynamic quality of Yggdrasill and the nine worlds is abundantly clear. The cycle is, perhaps, best understood as a spiral. If looked at from above or below, it is, indeed circular, like the uroboros figure, Jörmungand. The cycle has completed and it is back to its own beginning, the stage of arising. But, looked at from the side, the circle is revealed to be a spiral. Despite the fact that the end point and beginning point of the circle appear from above or below to touch one another, the beginning point is now on a higher plane. The spiral model reflects that this arising is not the same as the previous one. The *wyrd* has operated, and *orlog*, as it must, continues to prevail. Each new arising is contextualized by all that has gone before it. The blood of Odin flows in Vidar and Váli.

The tension between the giants and the gods is obviously a powerful and central theme that runs throughout Norse mythology. From the slaying of Ymir, the first frost-giant, by the brothers Odin, Vili, and Vé, to the final showdown between the giants and the gods at the time of Ragnarök, this leitmotif prevails. Perhaps, a cogent argument can be made that the overarching theme of Norse mythology, from the slaying of Ymir to Ragnarök, is this vendetta between the giants and the gods. One can, of course, use arising, being, and passing away as an understandable and highly

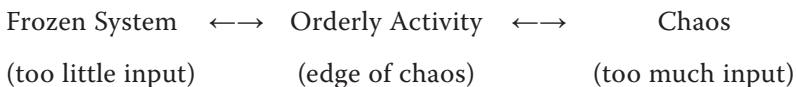
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appropriate frame of reference. The vendetta arose when Odin, Vili, and Vé slew Ymir. It continued to be, as skirmishes erupted from time to time between giants and gods, particularly Odin and Thor. The tension will pass away as both giants and the major gods will perish in their final battle.

This theme of tension between giants and gods can be labeled, too, as one of chaos versus order. Not only did Odin and Thor often oppose the giants and thereby stanch the flow of chaos, but in their creation of the universe from the body of Ymir, Odin and his brothers created order out of chaos.

To understand more fully this tension between the giants and the gods, or the states which they symbolize, chaos and order, let us consider some basic principles of complex systems theory. It is generally accepted that complex systems of very different types give rise to similar emergent properties. That Norse cosmology is appropriately represented as a complex system is clear enough. This suggests, therefore, that at least some of the principles of complex systems theory would be applicable. Using computer-generated models, Stuart Kauffman concluded that for any given system, there is an optimal number of inputs. With too little input, the system will freeze up, whereas with an optimal level of input, the system will go through orderly cycles of activity. Conversely, with more than optimal input, the system will become chaotic. That optimal number of inputs varies, of course, depending on the kind of system in question (Morris, 2001).

Borrowing, then, a term from computer science, Kauffman concluded that ongoing systems exist on the *edge of chaos*. In keeping with his conclusion, existence for a system is actually based on the seeking of this edge of chaos. Simply stated, every living system seeks the edge of chaos (Morris, 2001). Let us see this model in simple graphic form:



The dynamics which play out in Norse mythology can be recognized easily in Kauffman's model. Throughout much of the mythology, the giants and the gods interact within a state of tension, challenging one another to harmless contests and mutually hurling insults, having sex (gods with giantesses) and fighting without annihilating the races. Without the playing

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out of this tension, there would hardly have been a mythology worth telling! The system would have been more-or-less frozen. With this playing out of the tension, however, and with the added input of the wily dark elves, a lively and exciting mythology emerged. The cosmology qua living system sought the edge of chaos. Eventually, however, the input exceeded the edge of chaos as Loki broke loose from his bonds and went over to the side of the giants, Yggdrasil's roots were eaten away, Surt's army of fire-giants marched from Muspell, and hordes of giants crossed over Bifröst from Jötunheim. This was too much input for the cosmological system to remain in balance, order broke down, and complete chaos ensued.

Not to be underestimated is the role of Loki. As trickster, he introduced a whole other level with his disruptive behavior. Whereas the fall of Yggdrasil is of a cosmographical nature, the actions of Loki are events of the social world of myth. These actions are of at least two types, intentional and unintentional. The cutting of Sif's hair is of the former type. Surely, Loki would know that cutting off the hair of Thor's wife would anger Thor and foment mayhem. In spite of this he did so, intentionally. But, when it comes to his hurling the fatal stone at the otter, he did not know that this was Otter, the shape-shifted son of Hreidmar. The killing of Otter as Hreidmar's son was not intentional. But, recall, when he went to extract gold from the dark elf, Andvari, who was in a fish shape in a pool, Loki seized him by the tail and exacted all the gold the dark elf had as a ransom for Andvari's own life. When Andvari begged to retain one small ring, saying that by its means he could become wealthy once more, Loki demanded it. Andvari relented, but pronounced the curse that the ring would destroy everyone who owned it. Recall that Loki replied that the prophecy should be fulfilled only if he, himself, pronounced the curse in the ears of those about to take possession of the ring. The issue of intentional-unintentional becomes somewhat blurred in his encounter with Andvari. He acted with clear intention, at the same time not fully recognizing what he was doing. The upshot is that Loki acted as a trickster, whether intentionally or unintentionally, just out of his nature. That nature, itself, is paradoxical. Loki was counted among the gods and was therefore trusted by them. Yet, he was a trickster and therefore not to be trusted.

In keeping with the edge of chaos model, we can define the trickster's role as that of keeping the system from freezing. Eschewing sameness and

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boredom, the trickster stirs things up, generates excitement, and moves the system at least to the edge of chaos. Sometimes, as in the case of Loki, the trickster goes beyond this, whether intentionally or not, introducing more complexity than can be assimilated, and enveloping the system in chaos. Thus, the necessity of the trickster, and the danger.

By definition, mythology is not real in the sense of actually true. Likewise, Kauffman's model was not derived from empirical observation, but from computerized simulation. Neither is of the actual world. It seems the principles Kauffman found in his computer simulacrum can equally be recognized from a thoughtful reading of Norse mythology. We can clearly recognize an echo of Odin in Kauffman's model of the dynamics of complex systems.

With the publication in 1964 of *The Psychedelic Experience* by Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert, many eyes turned toward the East for guidance in understanding consciousness. Based on the research conducted by Harvard University psychologists Leary and Alpert, and participated in by Metzner, these three concluded that the then current models of the psyche were inadequate for the understanding of psychedelic experiences. They, themselves, turned to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* for counsel. Leary's next book was based on another source from the Far East, the *Tao Te Ching*. Their concern was with mapping human consciousness, itself. Metzner, in his 1971 *Maps of Consciousness*, distinguished a map from a theory. The former, he explained, may show the way, while the latter tends to explain.

Western psychology, in this view, and especially psychoanalysis, is more typified by theories, whereas Eastern philosophies tend more toward maps. In this regard, however, Western esoteric traditions are more like the Eastern philosophies. In his 1971 book, Metzner explored no less than six maps of consciousness: I Ching, tantra, tarot, alchemy, astrology and Agni yoga (Marlan, 1989). So, although he did not completely ignore all Western traditions, he did not include Norse mythology in his considerations. These three pioneer researchers have had an inestimable influence on the subsequent research and theorizing about human consciousness. It is understandable, then, that they have not been alone in the extent to which they particularly emphasized Eastern religions in their work. Many other psychologists, especially those who identify with humanistic and transpersonal psychology, have done so as well.

## *Conclusion*

Hopefully, this volume will partially rectify the omission of Norse mythology and gain a deserved place for it among the maps of human consciousness. The time may be ripe to unwrap the Norse myths, assume a metaphoric attitude, and discover the noble wisdom contained therein.



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